François Coppée

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FROM THE FRENCH

Ten Tales

By

François Coppée

Translated by WALTER LEARNED, *with fifty pen-and-ink drawings by* ALBERT E. STERNER, *and an introduction by* BRANDER MATTHEWS

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INTRODUCTION.

THE *conte* is a form of fiction in which the French have always delighted and in which they have always excelled, from the days of the *jongleurs* and the *trouvères*, past the periods of La Fontaine and Voltaire, down to the present. The *conte* is a tale, something more than a sketch, it may be, and something less than a short story. In verse it is at times but a mere rhymed anecdote, or it may attain almost to the direct swiftness of a ballad. The *Canterbury Tales* are *contes*, most of them, if not all; and so are some of the *Tales of a Wayside Inn*. The free-and-easy tales of Prior were written in imitation of the French *conte en vers;* and that, likewise, was the model of more than one of the lively narrative poems of Mr. Austin Dobson.

No one has succeeded more abundantly in the *conte en vers* than M. Coppée. Where was there ever anything better of its kind than *L' Enfant de la Balle?* — that gentle portrait of the Infant Phenomenon, framed in a chain of occasional gibes at the sordid ways of theatrical managers and at their hostility towards poetic plays. Where is there anything of a more simple pathos than *L' Epave?* — that story of a sailor's son whom the widowed mother strives vainly to keep from the cruel waves that killed his father. (It is worthy of a parenthesis that although the ship M. Coppée loves best is that which sails the blue shield of the City of Paris, he knows the sea also, and he depicts sailors with affectionate fidelity.) But whether at the sea-side by chance, or more often in the streets of the city, the poet seeks out for the subject of his story some incident of daily occurrence made significant by his interpretation; he chooses some character common-place enough, but made firmer by conflict with evil and by victory over self. Those whom he puts into his poems are still the humble, the forgotten, the neglected, the unknown; and it is the feelings and the

struggles of these that he tells us, with no maudlin sentimentality, and with no dead set at our sensibilities. The sub-title Mrs. Stowe gave to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would serve to cover most of M. Coppée's *contes* either in prose or verse; they are nearly all pictures of *life among the lowly*. But there is no forcing of the note in his painting of poverty and labor; there is no harsh juxtaposition of the blacks and the whites. The tone is always manly and wholesome.

La Marchande de Fournaux and the other little masterpieces of story-telling in verse are unfortunately untranslatable, as are all poems but a lyric or two, now and then, by a happy accident. A translated poem is a boiled strawberry, as some one once put it brutally. But the tales which M. Coppée has written in prose—a true poet's prose, nervous, vigorous, flexible, and firm—these can be Englished by taking thought and time and pains, without which a translation is always a betrayal. Ten of these tales have been rendered into English by Mr. Learned; and the ten chosen for translation are among the best of the two score and more of M. Coppée's *contes en prose*. These

ten tales are fairly representative of his range and variety. Compare, for example, the passion in "The Foster Sister," pure, burning and fatal, with the Black Forest *naïveté* of "The Sabots of Little Wolff." Contrast the touching pathos of "The Substitute," poignant in his magnificent self-sacrifice, by which the man who has conquered his shameful past goes back willingly to the horrible life he has fled from that he may save from a like degradation and from an inevitable moral decay the one friend he has in the world, all unworthy as this friend is — contrast this with the story of the gigantic deeds "My Friend Meurtrier" boasts about unceasingly, not knowing that he has been discovered in his little round of daily domestic duties, making the coffee of his good old mother and taking her poodle out for a walk.

Among these ten there are tales of all sorts, from the tragic adventure of "An Accident" to the pendent portraits of the "Two Clowns," cutting in its sarcasm, but not bitter—from "The Captain's Vices," which suggests at once George Eliot's *Silas Marner* and Mr. Austin Dobson's *Tale of Polypheme*, to the sombre revery of the poet "At

Table," a sudden and searching light cast on the labor and misery which underlies the luxury of our complex modern existence. Like "At Table," "A Dramatic Funeral" is a picture more than it is a story; it is a marvellous reproduction of the factitious emotion of the good-natured stage-folk, who are prone to overact even their own griefs and joys. "A Dramatic Funeral" seems to me always as though it might be a painting of M. Jean Beraud, that most Parisian of artists, just as certain stories of M. Guy de Maupassant inevitably suggest the bold freedom of M. Forain's sketches in black-and-white.

An ardent admirer of the author of the stories in *The Odd Number* has protested to me that M. Coppée is not an etcher like M. de Maupassant, but rather a painter in water-colors. And why not? Thus might we call M. Alphonse Daudet an artist in pastels, so adroitly does he suggest the very bloom of color. No doubt M. Coppée's *contes* have not the sharpness of M. de Maupassant's, nor the brilliancy of M. Daudet's—but what of it? They have qualities of their own; they have sympathy, poetry, and a power of suggesting pictures not exceeded, I think, by

those of either M. de Maupassant or M. Daudet. M. Coppée's street views in Paris, his interiors, his impressionist sketches of life under the shadows of Notre Dame, are convincingly successful. They are intensely to be enjoyed by those of us who take the same keen delight in the varied phases of life in New York. They are not, to my mind, really rivalled either by those of M. de Maupassant, who is a Norman by birth and a nomad by choice, or by those of M. Daudet, who is a native of Provence, although now for thirty years a resident of Paris. M. Coppée is a Parisian from his youth up, and even in prose he is a poet; perhaps this is why his pictures of Paris are unsurpassable in their felicity and in their verity.

It may be fancy, but I seem to see also a finer morality in M. Coppée's work than in M. de Maupassant's or in M. Daudet's or in that of almost any other of the Parisian story-tellers of to-day. In his tales we breathe a purer moral atmosphere, more wholesome and more bracing. It is not that M. Coppée probably thinks of ethics rather than æsthetics; in this respect his attitude is undoubtedly that of the others;

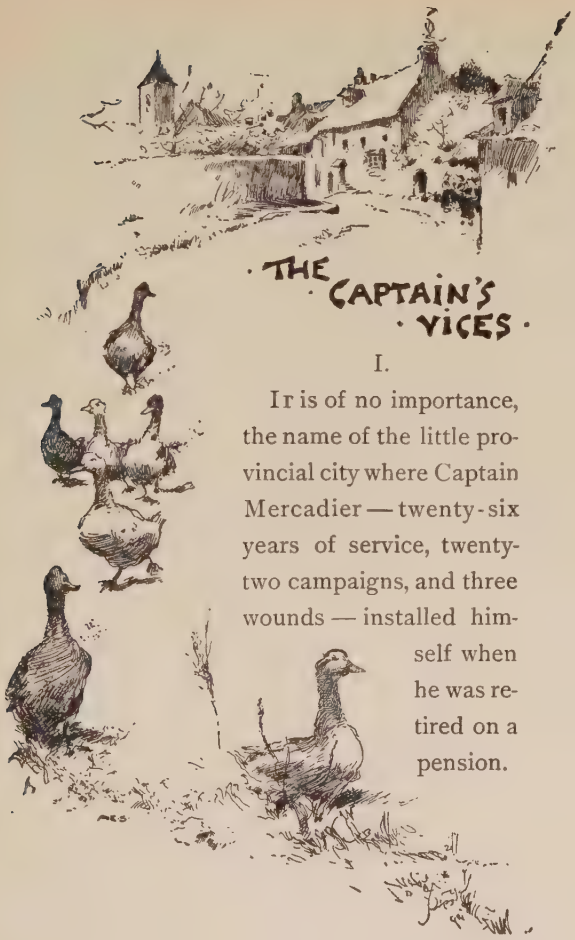
there is no sermon in his song—or at least none for those who will not seek it for themselves; there is never a hint of a preachment. But for all that I have found in his work a trace of the tonic morality which inheres in Molière, for example, also a Parisian by birth, and also in Rabelais, despite his disguising grossness. This finer morality comes possibly from a wider and a deeper survey of the universe; and it is as different as possible from the morality which is externally applied and which always punishes the villain in the fifth act.

It is of good augury for our own letters that the best French fiction of to-day is getting itself translated in the United States, and that the liking for it is growing apace. Fiction is more consciously an art in France than anywhere else—perhaps partly because the French are now foremost in nearly all forms of artistic endeavor. In the short story especially, in the tale, in the *conte*, their supremacy is incontestable; and their skill is shown and their æsthetic instinct exemplified partly in the sense of form, in the constructive method, which underlies the best short stories, however trifling these may

appear to be, and partly in the rigorous suppression of non-essentials, due in a measure, it may be, to the example of Mérimée. That is an example we in America may study to advantage; and from the men who are writing fiction in France we may gain much. From the British fiction of this last quarter of the nineteenth century little can be learned by any one—less by us Americans in whom the English tradition is still dominant. When we look to France for an exemplar we may find a model of value, but when we copy an Englishman we are but echoing our own faults. "The truth is," said Mr. Lowell in his memorable essay *On a Certain Condescension in Foreigners*—"the truth is that we are worth nothing except so far as we have disinfected ourselves of Anglicism."

BRANDER MATTHEWS.

THE CAPTAIN'S VICES.



THE CAPTAIN'S VICES

I.

It is of no importance, the name of the little provincial city where Captain Mercadier — twenty-six years of service, twenty-two campaigns, and three wounds — installed himself when he was retired on a pension.

It was quite like all those other little villages which solicit without obtaining it a branch of the railway; just as if it were not the sole dissipation of the natives to go every day, at the same hour, to the Place de la Fontaine to see the diligence come in at full gallop, with its gay cracking of the whips and clang of bells.

It was a place of three thousand inhabitants—ambitiously denominated souls in the statistical tables—and was exceedingly proud of its title of chief city of the canton. It had ramparts planted with trees, a pretty river with good fishing, a church of the charming epoch of the flamboyant Gothic, disgraced by a frightful station of the cross, brought directly from the quarter of Saint Sulpice. Every Monday its market was gay with great red and blue umbrellas, and countrymen filled its streets in carts and carriages. But for the rest of the week it retired with delight into that silence and

solitude which made it so dear to its rustic population. Its streets were paved with cobble-stones; through the windows of the ground-floor one could see samplers and wax-flowers under glass domes, and, through the gates of the gardens, statuettes of Napoleon in shell-work. The principal inn was naturally called the Shield of France; and the town-clerk made rhymed acrostics for the ladies of society.

Captain Mercadier had chosen that place of retreat for the simple reason that he had been born there, and because, in his noisy childhood, he had pulled down the signs and plugged up the bell-buttons. He returned there to find neither relations, nor friends, nor acquaintances; and the recollections of his youth recalled only the angry faces of shop-keepers who shook their fists at him from the shop-doors, a catechism which threatened him with hell, a school which predicted the scaffold, and, finally, his de-

parture for his regiment, hastened by a paternal malediction.

For the Captain was not a saintly man; the old record of his punishment was black with days in the guard-house inflicted for breaches of discipline, absences from roll-calls, and nocturnal uproars in the mess-room. He had often narrowly escaped losing his stripes as a corporal or a sergeant, and he needed all the chance, all the license of a campaigning life to gain his first epaulet. Firm and brave soldier, he had passed almost all his life in Algiers at that time when our foot soldiers wore the high shako, white shoulder-belts and huge cartridge-boxes. He had had Lamoricière for commander. The Duc de Nemours, near whom he received his first wound, had decorated him, and when he was sergeant-major, Père Bugrand had called him by his name and pulled his ears. He had been a prisoner of Abd-el-Kader, bearing the scar of a yataghan stroke

on his neck, of one ball in his shoulder and another in his chest; and notwithstanding absinthe, duels, debts of play, and almond-eyed Jewesses, he fairly won, with the point of the bayonet and sabre, his grade of captain in the First Regiment of Sharp-shooters.

Captain Mercadier — twenty-six years of service, twenty-two campaigns, and three wounds—had just retired on his pension, not quite two thousand francs, which, joined to the two hundred and fifty francs from his cross, placed him in that estate of honorable penury which the State reserves for its old servants.

His entry into his natal city was without ostentation. He arrived one morning on the imperiale of the diligence, chewing an extinguished cigar, and already on good terms with the conductor, to whom, during his journey, he had related the passage of the Porte de Fer; full of indulgence, moreover, for the distractions of his auditor, who

often interrupted the recital by some oath or epithet addressed to the off mare. When the diligence stopped he threw on the side-walk his old valise, covered with railway placards as numerous as the changes of garrison that its proprietor had made, and the idlers of the neighborhood were astonished to see a man with a decoration — a rare thing in the province—offer a glass of wine to the coachman at the bar of an inn near by.

He installed himself at once. In a house in the outskirts, where two captive cows lowed, and fowls and ducks passed and repassed through the gate-way, a furnished chamber was to let. Preceded by a masculine-looking woman, the Captain climbed the stair-way with its great wooden balusters, perfumed by a strong odor of the stable, and reached a great tiled room, whose walls were covered with a bizarre paper representing, printed in blue on a white background and

repeated infinitely, the picture of Joseph Poniatowski crossing the Elster on his horse. This monotonous decoration, recalling nevertheless our military glories, fascinated the Captain without doubt, for, without concerning himself with the uncomfortable straw chairs, the walnut furniture, or the little bed with its yellowed curtain, he took the room without hesitation. A quarter of an hour was enough to empty his trunk, hang up his clothes, put his boots in a corner, and ornament the wall with a trophy composed of three pipes, a sabre, and a pair of pistols. After a visit to the grocer's, over the way, where he bought a pound of candles and a bottle of rum, he returned, put his purchase on the mantle-shelf, and looked around him with an air of perfect satisfaction. And then, with the promptitude of the camp, he shaved without a mirror, brushed his coat, cocked his hat over his ear, and went for a walk in the village in search of a café.

II.

It was an inveterate habit of the Captain to spend much of his time at a café. It was there that he satisfied at the same time the three vices which reigned supreme in his heart—tobacco, absinthe, and cards. It was thus that he passed his life, and he could have drawn a plan of all the places where he had ever been stationed by their tobacco shops, cafés, and military clubs. He never felt himself so thoroughly at ease as when sitting on a worn velvet bench before a square of green cloth near a heap of beer-mugs and saucers. His cigar never seemed good unless he struck his match under the marble of the table, and he never failed, after hanging his hat and his sabre on a hat-hook and settling himself comfortably, by unloosing one or two buttons of his coat, to breathe a profound sigh of relief, and exclaim,

"That is better!"

His first care was, therefore, to find an establishment which he could frequent, and after having gone around the village without finding anything that suited him, he stopped at last to regard with the eye of a connoisseur the Café Prosper, situated at the corner of the Place du Marché and the Rue de la Pavoisse.

It was not his ideal. Some of the details of the exterior were too provincial: the waiter, in his black apron, for example, the little stands in their green frames, the footstools, and the wooden tables covered with waxed cloth. But the interior pleased the Captain. He was delighted upon his entrance by the sound of the bell which was touched by the fair and fleshy dame du comptoir, in her light dress, with a poppy-colored ribbon in her sleek hair. He saluted her gallantly, and believed that she sustained with sufficient majesty her trium-

phal place between two piles of punch-bowls properly crowned by billiard-balls. He ascertained that the place was cheerful, neat, and strewn evenly with yellow sand. He walked around it, looking at himself in the glasses as he passed; approved the panels where guardsmen and amazons were drinking champagne in a landscape filled with red holly-hocks; called for his absinthe, smoked, found the divan soft and the absinthe good, and was indulgent enough not to complain of the flies who bathed themselves in his glass with true rustic familiarity.

Eight days later he had become one of the pillars of the Café Prosper.

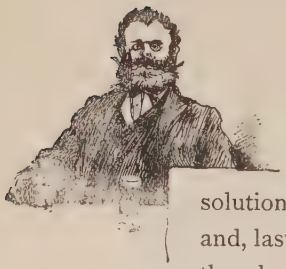
They soon learned his punctual habits and anticipated his wishes, while he, in turn, lunched with the patrons of the place — a valuable recruit for those who haunted the café, folks oppressed by the tedium of a country life, for whom the arrival of that new-comer, past master in all games, and

an admirable *raconteur* of his wars and his loves, was a true stroke of good-fortune. The Captain himself was delighted to tell his stories to folks who were still ignorant of his repertoire. There were fully six months before him in which to tell of his games, his feats, his battles, the retreat of Constantine, the capture of Bou-Maza, and the officers' receptions with the concomitant intoxication of rum-punch.

Human weakness! He was by no means sorry, on his part, to be something of an oracle; he from whom the sub-lieutenants, new-comers at Saint-Cyr, fled dismayed, fearing his long stories.

His usual auditors were the keeper of the café, a stupid and silent beer-cask, always in his sleeved vest, and remarkable

only for his carved pipe; the bailiff, a scoffer, dressed invariably in black, scorned for his inelegant habit of carrying off what remained of his sugar; the town-clerk, the gentleman of acrostics, a person of much amiability and a feeble constitution, who sent to the illustrated journals solutions of enigmas and rebuses; and, lastly, the veterinary surgeon of the place, the only one who, from his position of atheist and democrat, was allowed to contradict the Captain. This practitioner, a man with tufted whiskers and eye-glasses, presided over the radical committee of electors, and when the curé took up a little collection among his devotees for the purpose of adorning his church with some frightful red and gilded statues, denounced, in a letter to the *Siècle*, the cupidity of the Jesuits.



The Captain having gone out one evening for some cigars after an animated political discussion, the aforesaid veterinary grumbled to himself certain phrases of heavy irritation concerning "coming to the point," and "a mere fencing-master," and "cutting a figure." But as the object of these vague menaces suddenly returned, whistling a march and beating time with his cane, the incident was without result.

In short, the group lived harmoniously together, and willingly permitted themselves to be presided over by the new-comer, whose white beard and martial bearing were quite impressive. And the small city, proud of so many things, was also proud of its retired Captain.

III.

Perfect happiness exists nowhere, and Captain Mercadier, who believed that he

had found it at the Café Prosper, soon recovered from his illusion.

For one thing, on Mondays, the market-day, the Café Prosper was untenantable.

From early morning it was overrun with truck-peddlers, farmers, and poultrymen. Heavy men with coarse voices, red necks, and great whips in their hands, wearing blue blouses and otter-skin caps, bargaining over their cups, stamping their feet, striking their fists, familiar with the servant, and bungling at billiards.

When the Captain came, at eleven o'clock, for his first glass of absinthe, he found this crowd gathered, and already half-drunk, ordering a quantity of lunches. His usual place was taken, and he was served slowly and badly. The bell was continually sounding, and the proprietor and the waiter, with napkins under their arms, were running distractedly hither and thither. In short, it was an ill-omened day, which upset his entire existence.

Now, one Monday morning, when he was resting quietly at home, being sure that the café would be much too full and busy, the mild radiance of the autumn sun persuaded

him to go down and sit upon the stone seat by the side of the house. He was sitting there, depressed and smoking a damp cigar, when he saw coming down the end of the

street—it was a badly paved lane leading out into the country—a little girl of eight or ten, driving before her a half-dozen geese.

As the Captain looked carelessly at the child he saw that she had a wooden leg.

There was nothing paternal in the heart of the soldier. It was that of a hardened bachelor. In former days, in the streets of Algiers, when the little begging Arabs pursued him with their importunate prayers, the Captain had often chased them away with blows from his whip; and on those rare occasions when he had penetrated the nomadic household of some comrade who was married and the father of a family, he had gone away cursing the crying babies and awkward children who had touched with their greasy hands the gilding on his uniform.

But the sight of that particular infirmity, which recalled to him the sad spectacle of wounds and amputations, touched, on that account, the old soldier. He felt almost a

constriction of the heart at the sight of that sorry creature, half-clothed in her tattered petticoats and old chemise, bravely running along behind her geese, her bare foot in the dust, and limping on her ill-made wooden stump.

The geese, recognizing their home, turned into the poultry-yard, and the little one was about to follow them when the Captain stopped her with this question:

"Eh! little girl, what's your name?"

"Pierette, monsieur, at your service," she answered, looking at him with her great black eyes, and pushing her disordered locks from her forehead.

"You live in this house, then? I haven't seen you before."

"Yes, I know you pretty well, though, for I sleep under the stairs, and you wake me up every evening when you come home."

"Is that so, my girl? Ah, well, I must walk on my toes in future. How old are you?"

"Nine, monsieur, come All-Saints day."

"Is the landlady here a relative of yours?"

"No, monsieur, I am in service."

"And they give you?"

"Soup, and a bed under the stairs."

"And how came you to be lame like that, my poor little one?"

"By the kick of a cow when I was five."

"Have you a father or mother?"

The child blushed under her sunburned skin. "I came from the Foundling Hospital," she said, briefly. Then, with an awkward courtesy, she passed limping into the house, and the Captain heard, as she went away on the pavement of the court, the hard sound of the little wooden leg.

Good heavens! he thought, mechanically walking towards his café, that's not at all the thing. A soldier, at least, they pack off to the Invalides, with the money from his medal to keep him in tobacco. For an officer, they fix up a collectorship, and he marries some

where in the provinces. But this poor girl, with such an infirmity,—that's not at all the thing!

Having established in these terms the injustice of fate, the Captain reached the threshold of his dear café, but he saw there such a mob of blue blouses, he heard such a din of laughter and click of billiard-balls, that he returned home in very bad humor.

His room—it was, perhaps, the first time that he had spent in it several hours of the day—looked rather shabby. His bed-curtains were the color of an old pipe. The fireplace was heaped with old cigar-stumps, and one could have written his name in the dust on the furniture. He contemplated for some time the walls where the sublime lancer of Leipsic rode a hundred times to a glorious death. Then, for an occupation, he passed his wardrobe in review. It was a lamentable series of bottomless pockets, socks full of holes, and shirts without buttons.

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"I must have a servant," he said.

Then he thought of the little lame girl.

"That's what I'll do. I'll hire the next little room; winter is coming, and the little thing will freeze under the stairs. She will look after my clothes and my linen and keep the barracks clean. A valet, how's that?"

But a cloud darkened the comfortable picture. The Captain remembered that quarter-day was still a long way off, and that his account at the Café Prosper was assuming alarming proportions.

"Not rich enough," he said to himself. "And in the mean time they are robbing me down there. That is positive. The board is too high, and that wretch of a veterinary plays bezique much too well. I have paid his way now for eight days. Who knows? Perhaps I had better put the little one in charge of the mess, soup au café in the morning, stew at noon, and ragout every even-

ing — campaign life, in fact. I know all about that. Quite the thing to try."

Going out he saw at once the mistress of the house, a great brutal peasant, and the little lame girl, who both, with pitchforks in their hands, were turning over the dung-heap in the yard.

"Does she know how to sew, to wash, to make soup?" he asked, brusquely.

"Who—Pierette? Why?"

"Does she know a little of all that?"

"Of course. She came from an asylum where they learn how to take care of themselves."

"Tell me, little one," added the Captain, speaking to the child, "I am not scaring you—no? Well, my good woman, will you let me have her? I want a servant."

"If you will support her."

"Then that is finished. Here are twenty francs. Let her have to-night a dress and a shoe. To-morrow we'll arrange the rest."

And, with a friendly tap on Pierette's cheek, the Captain went off, delighted that everything was concluded. Possibly he thought he would have to cut off some glasses of beer and absinthe, and be cautious of the veterinary's skill at bezique. But that was not worth speaking of, and the new arrangement would be quite the thing.

IV.

Captain, you are a coward!

Such was the apostrophe with which the caryatides of the Café Prosper hereafter greeted the Captain, whose visits became rarer day by day.

For the poor man had not seen all the consequences of his good action. The suppression of his morning absinthe had been sufficient to cover the modest expense of Pierette's keeping, but how many other re-

forms were needed to provide for the unforeseen expenses of his bachelor establishment! Full of gratitude, the little girl wished to prove it by her zeal. Already the aspect of his room was changed. The furniture was dusted and arranged, the fireplace cleaned, the floor polished, and spiders no longer spun their webs over the deaths of Poniatowski in the corner. When the Captain came home the inviting odor of cabbage-soup saluted him on the staircase, and the sight of the smoking plates on the coarse but white table-cloth, with a bunch of flowers and polished table-ware, was quite enough to give him a good appetite. Pierette profited by the good-humor of her master to confess some of her secret ambitions. She wanted andirons for the fireplace, where there was now always a fire burning, and a mould for the little cakes that she knew how to make so well. And the Captain, smiling at the child's requests, but charmed with the home-

like atmosphere of his room, promised to think of it, and on the morrow replaced his Londres by cigars for a sou each, hesitated to offer five points at ecarté, and refused his third glass of beer or his second glass of chartreuse.

Certainly the struggle was long; it was cruel. Often, when the hour came for the glass that was denied him by economy, when thirst seized him by the throat, the Captain was forced to make an heroic effort to withdraw his hand already reaching out towards the swan's beak of the café; many times he wandered about, dreaming of the king turned up and of quint and quatorze. But he almost always courageously returned home; and as he loved Pierette more through every sacrifice that he made for her, he em-

braced her more fondly every day. For he did embrace her. She was no longer his servant. When once she stood before him at the table, calling him "Monsieur," and so respectful in her bearing, he could not stand it, but seizing her by her two hands, he said to her, eagerly:

"First embrace me, and then sit down and do me the pleasure of speaking familiarly, confound it!"

And so to-day it is accomplished. Meeting a child has saved that man from an ignominious age.

He has substituted for his old vices a young passion. He adores the little lame girl who skips around him in his room, which is comfortable and well furnished.

He has already taught Pierette to read, and, moreover, recalling his caligraphy as a sergeant-major, he has set her copies in writing. It is his greatest joy when the child, bending attentively over her paper, and some-

times making a blot which she quickly licks up with her tongue, has succeeded in copying all the letters of an interminable adverb in *ment.* His uneasiness is in thinking that he is growing old and has nothing to leave his adopted child.

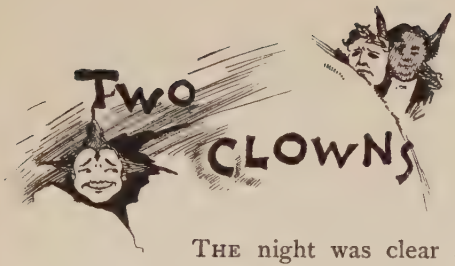
And so he becomes almost a miser; he theorizes; he wishes to give up his tobacco, although Pierette herself fills and lights his pipe for him. He counts on saving from his slender income enough to purchase a little stock of fancy goods. Then when he is dead she can live an obscure and tranquil life, hanging up somewhere in the back room of the small shop an old cross of the Legion of Honor, her souvenir of the Captain.

Every day he goes to walk with her on the rampart. Sometimes they are passed by folks who are strangers in the village, who look with compassionate surprise at the old soldier, spared from the wars, and the poor

lame child. And he is moved—oh, so pleasantly, almost to tears — when one of the passers-by whispers, as they pass:

"Poor father! Yet how pretty his daughter is."

TWO CLOWNS.



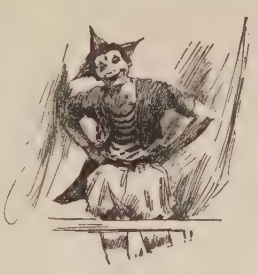
THE night was clear and glittering with stars, and there was a crowd upon the market-place. They crowded in gaping delight around the tent of some strolling acrobats, where red and smoking lanterns lighted the performance which was just beginning. Rolling their muscular limbs in dirty wraps, and decorated from head to foot with tawdry ruffles of fur, the athletes—four boyish ruffians with vulgar heads—were ranged in line before the painted canvas which represented their exploits ; they stood there with their heads down, their legs apart, and their muscular

arms crossed upon their chests. Near them the marshal of the establishment, an old sub-officer, with the drooping mustache of a brandy-drinker, belted in at the waist, a heart of red cloth on his leather breastplate, leaned on a pair of foils. The feminine attraction, a rose in her hair, with a man's overcoat protecting her against the freshness of the evening air over her ballet-dancer's dress, played at the same time the cymbals and the big bass-drum a desperate accompaniment to three measures of a polka, always the same, which were murdered by a blind clarionet player; and the ringmaster, a sort of Hercules with the face of a galley-slave, a Silenus in scarlet drawers, roared out his furious appeal in a loud voice. Mixed with the crowd of loafers, soldiers, and women, I regarded the abject spectacle with disgust—the last vestige of the olympic games.

Suddenly the music ceased, and the crowd

broke into roars of laughter. The clown had just made his appearance.

He wore the ordinary costume of his kind, the short vest and many-colored stockings of the peasants of the opera comique, the three horns turned backward, the red wig with its turned-up queue and its butterfly on the end. He was a young man, but alas, his face, whitened with flour, was already seamed with vice. Planting himself before the public, and opening his mouth in a silly grin, he showed bleeding gums almost devoid of teeth. The ringmaster kicked him violently from behind.



"Come in," he said, tranquilly.

Then the traditional dialogue, punctuated by slaps in the face, began between the

mountebank and his clown, and the entire audience applauded these souvenirs of the classic farce, fallen from the theatre to the stage of the mountebank, and whose humor, coarse but pungent, seemed a drunken echo of the laughter of Molière. The clown exerted his low talent, throwing out at each moment some low jest, some immodest pun, to which his master, simulating a prudish indignation, responded by thumps on the head. But the adroit clown excelled in the art of receiving affronts. He knew to perfection how to bend his body like a bow under the impulse of a kick, and having received on one cheek a full-armed blow, he stuffed his tongue at once in that cheek and began to whine until a new blow passed the artificial swelling into the other cheek. Blows showered on him as thick as hail, and, disappearing under a shower of slaps, the flour on his face and the red powder of his wig enveloped him like a cloud. At last he

exhausted all his resources of low scurrility, ridiculous contortions, grotesque grimaces, pretended aches, falls at full length, etc., till the ringmaster, judging this gratuitous show long enough, and that the public were sufficiently fascinated, sent him off with a final cuff.

Then the music began again with such violence that the painted canvas trembled. The clown, having seized the sticks of a drum fixed on one of the beams of the scaffolding, mingled a triumphant rataplan with the bombardment of the bass-drum, the cracked thunder of the cymbals, and the distracted wail of the clarionet. The ringmaster, roaring again with his heavy voice, announced that the show was about to begin, and, as a sign of defiance, he threw two or three old fencing-gloves among his fellow-wrestlers. The crowd rushed into the tent, and soon only a small group of loungers remained in front of the deserted stage.

I was just going off, when I noticed by my side an old woman who looked with strange persistence at the empty stage where the red lights were still burning. She wore the linen bonnet and the crossed fichu of the poorer class of women, and her whole appearance was that of neatness and honesty. Asking myself what powerful interest could hold her in such a place, I looked at her with more attention, and I saw that her eyes were full of tears, and that her hands, which she had crossed over her breast, were trembling with emotion.

"What is the matter with you?" I said, coming near to her, impelled by an instinctive sympathy.

"The matter, good sir?" cried the old woman, bursting into tears. "Passing by this market-place — oh, quite by chance, I tell you (I have no heart for pleasure)—passing before that dreadful tent, I have just seen in the wretch who has received all those

blows my only son, sir, my sole child! It is the grief of my life, do you see? I never knew what had become of him since—oh, since my poor husband sent him away to sea as a cabin-boy. He was apprenticed to an ironmonger, sir. He robbed his master —he, the son of two honest people. As for me, I would have pardoned him. You know what mothers are. But my man, when they came and told him that his son had stolen, he was like a madman. It was that that killed him, I am sure. I have never seen the unhappy child again. For five years I have heard nothing from him. I sought to deceive myself. I said experience will reform him, and there—there—just now—"

And the poor old woman sobbed in a pitiful way. A crowd had formed. It was no longer to me that she spoke; it was not to the crowd; it was to herself, to the bitterness of her own heart.

"He, my Adrien, the child that I nourish-

ed at my own breast, a mountebank in a travelling theatre! struck and insulted before the whole world! He, whom I saved at four when he was so ill, a clown in a tent! He, the beautiful baby of whom I was so proud, whom I made the neighbors admire when he was so small that he rolled naked on my knee, holding his little foot in his hand!"

Suddenly at this point in her heart-breaking monologue the old woman perceived the crowd listening to her. She looked on the spectators in astonishment, as one who starts from sleep. She recognized me who had questioned her, and became frightfully pale.

"What have I said?" she stammered. "Let me pass." And brusquely putting us aside with an imperious gesture, she went off with a rapid step, and disappeared in the night.

The adventure made a lively impression on me. I thought often of it, and after that,

when I saw before my eyes some wretched and degraded creature, some woman of the street, trailing her light silk skirts in the flare of a gas-jet, some drunken idler leaning on the bar of a café and bending his bloated face over his glass of absinthe, I have thought, "Is it possible that that being can ever have been a little child?"

Now, some little time after that *rencontre* —let us be careful not to indicate the date —I was taken into a gallery of the Chamber of Deputies to be present at a sensational sitting. The law that they were discussing on that day is of no importance, but it was the old and tedious story: a Ministerial candidate, formerly in the Opposition, proposed to strike a blow at some liberty — I don't know what—which he had formerly demanded with virulence and force. And, more than that, the man in power was going to forfeit his word to the tribune. In good French that is called "to betray," but in

parliamentary language they employ the phrase, "accomplish a change of base." Opinion was divided, the majority uncertain; and upon his speech would depend the political future of the speaker. Therefore, on that day, the legislators were in their places, and the Chamber did not resemble, as usual, a class of noisy boys presided over by a master without authority. The lunch-counter was deserted, and the deputies of the Centre themselves were not absorbed in their personal correspondence.

The orator mounted the tribune. He had the commonplace figure of a verbose orator: bold eye, protruding lips, as enlarged by the abuse of words. He began by fingering his notes with an important air, tasting the glass of sweetened water, and settling himself in his place; then he started a babble of words without sense, with the nauseous facility of the bar; misusing vague ideas, abstract terms, and words in *ly* and *ion*, stereotyped

words, and ready-made phrases. A flattering murmur greeted the end of his exordium; for the French people in general, and the political world in particular, manifest a depraved taste for that sort of eloquence. Encouraged, the fine speaker entered the heart of his subject, and cynically sang his recantation. He abjured none of his opinions, he repudiated none of his acts; he would always remain liberal (a blow on his chest), but that which was good yesterday might be dangerous to-day; truth on the other side of the Alps, error on this side. The forbearance of the Government was abused. And he threatened the assembly; became prophet; let loose the dogs of war. He even risked a bit of poetry, flourished old metaphors, which were worn out in the time of Cicero, and compared by turn, in the same phrase, his political career to a pilot, a steed, and a torch. So much poetry could only accentuate his success. There was a

salvo of bravos, and the Opposition grumbled, foreseeing their defeat. Violent interruptions broke forth: furious voices recalled the orator's past life, and threw as insults his former professions in his face. He was unmoved, and stood with a disdainful air, which was very effective. Then the bravos redoubled, and he smiled vaguely, thinking, no doubt, of the proof-sheets of the *Officiel*, where he could by-and-by insert in the margin, without too much exaggeration, "profound sensation" and "prolonged applause." Then, when quiet was re-established, sure of his success, he affected a serene majesty. He took up again his discourse, soaring like a goose, launching out with high doctrine, citing Royer-Collard.

But I heard no more. The scandalous spectacle of that political mountebank, who sacrificed eternal principles to the interests of the day, recalled to my memory the tent of the acrobats. The cold rhetoric of that harangue, vibrating with neither truth nor emotion, recalled to me the patter, learned by heart, of the powdered clown on the stage. The superb air which the orator assumed under the rain of reproaches and insults singularly resembled the indifference of the clown to the loud slaps on his face. Those sonorous phrases, whose echoes had just died away, sounded as false as a strolling band. The word "liberty" rolled like the bass-drum, "public interests" and "welfare of the State" clanged discordantly like the cymbals, and when the comedian spoke of his "patriotism" I almost heard the *couac* of a clarionet.

A long uproar woke me from my revery. The speech was finished, and the

orator, having descended from the rostrum, was receiving congratulations. They were about to vote: the urns were being passed around, but the result was certain, and the crowd of tribunes was already dispersing.

As I went across the vestibule I saw an elderly lady dressed in black. She was dressed like a wealthy bourgeoise and appeared radiant. I stopped one of the well-groomed little chaps whom one sees trotting around in the Ministerial corridors. I knew him slightly, and I asked him who that lady was.

"The mother of the orator," he replied, with official emotion. "She must be very proud."

Very proud! The old mother who wept so bitterly in the market-place was not that; and if the mother of his future Excellency had reflected, she would have regretted—she too—the time when her boy was very small,

and rolled naked on her knee, holding his little foot in his hand.

But, bah! everything is relative, even shame.

A VOLUNTARY DEATH.

I KNEW the poet Louis Miraz very well, in the old times in the Latin Quarter, where we used to take our meals together at a crémerie on the Rue de Seine, kept by an old Polish woman whom we nicknamed the Princess Chocolawska, on account of the enormous bowl of créme and chocolate which she exposed daily in the show-window of her shop. It was possible to dine there for ten sous, with "two breads," an "ordinaire for thirty centimes," and a "small coffee."

Some who were very nice spent a sou more for a napkin.

Besides some young men who were destined to become geniuses, the ordinary guests of the crémerie were some poor compatriots of the proprietress, who had all to some extent commanded armies. There was, above all, an imposing and melancholy old fellow with a white beard, whose old befrogged cloak, shabby boots, and old hat, which looked as if snails had crawled over it, presented a poem of misery, and whom the other Poles treated with a marked respect, for he had been a dictator for three days.

It was, moreover, at the Princess Chocolawska's that I knew a singular fool, who gained his bread by giving German lessons, and declared himself a convert to Buddhism. On the mantle of the miserable room, where he lived with a milliner of Saint-Germain, was enthroned an ugly little Buddha in jade,

fixing his hypnotized eyes on his navel, and holding his great toes in his hands. The German professor accorded to the idol the most profound veneration, but on the epoch of quarter-day he was sometimes forced to carry him to the Mont-de-piété, upon which he fell into a state of sombre chagrin, and did not recover his serenity until he was able to make amends for his impious act. He never failed, moreover, to renew his avowals in prosperous times, and finally to take his god out of pawn.

As to Louis Miraz, he had the deep eyes, the pale complexion, and the long and dishevelled hair of all those young men who come to town in third-class carriages to conquer glory, who spend more for midnight oil than for beefsteaks, and who, rich already with some manuscripts, have thrown out to great Paris from the height of some hill in its environs the classic defiance of Rastignac. At that time my hair was archaic

enough in length to grease the collar of my coat. Thus we were made to understand each other, and Louis Miraz soon took me to his attic-room in the Rue des Quatre-

Vents, where he dragged two thousand alexandrines over me.

Seriously, they were fresh and charming verses, with the inspiration of spring-tide, having the perfume of the first lilacs, and *Forest Birds* (the title of that collection of poems which Louis Miraz published a little

while after he read them to me) will retain a place among the volumes in the first rank of belles-lettres, by the side of those poets of a single book—of the Daudet of the Amoureuses, for example.

For Miraz wrote no more verse. A young eaglet seeking the upper air, he made his eyrie on the summit of Montmartre, and for quite a while we lost sight of him. Then I found his name again in Sunday journals and reviews, when he began to write those short and exquisite sketches which have made his reputation. Thus five years passed, when I met him one day in the editor's office of a journal for which I worked.

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Each of us was as much pleased as the other at thus meeting again; and after the first "What, is that you? Is that you?" we stood facing each other, shaking hands, and exposing, in a laugh of cordial delight, our teeth, which in old times we used to exercise

on the same crust of poverty. He had not changed. He had not even sacrificed his long hair, which he threw back with the graceful movement of a horse who tosses his mane. Only he had the clear complexion and calm eye of a contented man, and his slim figure was clad in most fashionable costume.

"We won't drift apart again, will we?" said he, affectionately, taking me by the arm; and he led me out in the boulevard, where the April sun gilded the young leaves of the plane-trees.

Ah, happy day! How we exhausted the "Don't you remembers?" "Do you remember the fried eggs which tasted of straw, and the dreadful rice-milk of the Princess Chocolawska? and the melancholy air of the old dictator? and the German who used to pawn his god every three months?" At last those days of hardship were finished. He had from afar applauded my success, as I

had watched his. But one thing I did not know, and that was that he had married a woman whom he adored, and that he had a charming little girl.

"Come and see them; you shall dine with me."

I let myself be persuaded, and he carried me down to the Enclos des Ternes, where he lived in a cottage among the trees. There everything made you welcome. No sooner had we opened the door of the garden than a young dog frisked about our feet.

"Down, Gavroche! He will soil your clothes."

But at the sound of the bell Madame Miraz appeared at the steps with her little daughter in her arms. An imposing and beautiful blond, her well-moulded figure wrapped in a blue gown.

"Put on a plate more. I've an old comrade with me."

And the happy father, keeping his hat on his head and carrying his little girl, showed me all over his establishment—the dining-room, brightened by light bits of faience, the study, abounding in books, with its window opening out on the green turf, so that a puff of wind had strewn with rose-leaves the printer's proofs which were scattered on the table.

"This is only a beginning, you know. It wasn't so long ago that we were working for three sous a line."

And while I luxuriated under a blossoming Judas-tree which I saw in the garden, Miraz, at ease in his home, had slipped into his working-vest, put on his slippers, and, lying on his sofa, caught little Helen in his arms to toss her in the air—"Houp la! Houp la!"

I do not remember ever to have had a more perfect impression of contentment. We dined pleasantly — two good courses,

that was all; a dinner without pretence, where we served ourselves with the pepper-mill. The charming Madame Miraz presided with her bright smile, having her child by her side in a high-chair. She spoke but little, but her sweet and intelligent attention followed our light and paradoxical chat, the good-humored fooling of men of letters; and at the dessert she took a rose from the bouquet which ornamented the table, and placed it in her hair near her ear with a supreme grace. She was indeed that lovely and silent friend whom a dreamer requires.

We took our coffee in the study—they intended to furnish the salon very soon with the price of a story to be published by Levy—then, as the evening was cool, a fire of sticks and twigs was built, and while we smoked, Miraz and I, recalling old memories, the mistress of the house, holding on her knees little Helen, now ready for bed, made her repeat "Our Father" and "Hail Mary,"

which the little one lisped, rubbing her little feet together before the warm flame.

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We saw each other again, often at first, then less frequently, the difficult and complicated life of literary labor taking us each his own way. So the years passed. We met, shook hands. "Everything going well?" "Splendidly." And that was all. Then, later, I found the name of Louis Miraz but rarely in the journals and periodicals. "Happy man; he is resting," I said to myself, remembering that he was spoken of as having made a small fortune. Finally, last autumn, I learned that he was seriously ill.

I hurried to see him. He still lived at the Enclos des Ternes; but on this sombre day of the last of November the little house seemed cold, and looked naked among the leafless trees. It seemed to me shrunken and diminished, like everything that we have not seen for a long time.

The dog was probably dead, for his bark no longer answered the sound of the bell when I passed the little gate and entered the garden, all strewn with dead leaves where the night's frost had withered the last chrysanthemums.

It was not Madame Miraz—she was absent—it was Helen who received me, Helen, who had grown to be a great girl of fourteen, with an awkward manner. She opened for me the door of her father's study, and brusquely lifting her great black eyelashes, turned on me a timid and distressed glance.

I found Miraz huddled in an easy-chair in the corner of the fireplace, wrapped in a sort of bed-gown, with gray locks streaking his long hair; and by the cold, clammy hand which he reached towards me, by the pallid face which he turned upon me, I knew that he was lost. Horrible! I found in my unhappy comrade that worn and ruined look

which used to strike us formerly among the poor Poles of the crémerie.

"Ah, well, old man, things are not going well?"

"Deucedly bad, my boy," he answered, with a heart-breaking smile. "I am going out stupidly with consumption, as they do in the fifth act, you know, when the venerable doctor, with a head like Béranger, feels the first walking gentleman's pulse, and lifts his eyes towards heaven, saying, 'The death-

struggle approaches!' Only the difference is that with me it continues; it will not conclude, the death-struggle. Smoke away; that doesn't disturb me," he added, seeing me put my cigar one side, his cough sounding like a death-rattle.

I tried to find encouraging words. I talked with him, holding him by the hand and patting him affectionately on the shoulder; but my voice had in my own ears the empty hollowness of deceit, and Miraz, looking at me, seemed to pity my efforts.

I was silent.

"Look," said he, pointing to his table; "see my work-bench. For six months I have not been able to write."

It was true. Nothing could be more sad than that heap of papers covered with dust, and in an old Roman plate there was a bundle of pens, crusted with ink, and like those trophies of rusty foils which hang on the walls of old fencers.

I made a new attempt to revive him. Die! at his age. Nonsense! He wasn't taking care of himself. He must pass the winter in the South, drink a good draught of sunlight. He could. He was easy in his money matters.

But he stopped me, putting his hand on my arm.

"Listen," he said, gravely, "we have seen each other seldom, but you are my oldest, perhaps my best, friend. You have proved me pen in hand. Well, I am going to tell you something in confidence, for you to keep to yourself, unless it may serve on some occasion to discourage the young literary aspirants who bring their manuscripts to you — always a praiseworthy action. Yes, I have been successful. Yes, I have been paid a franc a line. Yes, I have made money, and there in that drawer are a certain number of yellow, green, and red papers from which a bit is clipped every six months,

and which represent three or four thousand francs of income. It is rare in our profession, and to gain that poor hoard I have been obliged—I, a poet—to imitate the unsociable virtues of a bourgeois, know how to deny a jewel to my wife, a dress to my daughter. At last I have that money. And I often said to myself, if I should die their bread is assured, and here is a little marriage portion for Helen! And I was content—I was proud!—for I know them, the stories of our widows and our orphans, the fourpenny help of the government, the tobacco shops for six hundred francs in the province, and, if the daughter is intelligent and pretty like mine, the dramatic author, an old friend of the father, who advises her to enter the Conservatoire, and who makes of her—mercy of God! that shall never be. But for all that, my boy, it is necessary that I should not linger. Sickness is expensive, and already it has been necessary to sell

one or two bonds from that drawer. To seek the sunlight, as you suggest, to bask like a lizard at Cannes or at Menton, one more bond must go, and there would not be enough to last to the end, if I should wait for seven or eight years more, now that I can no longer write. Happily, there is nothing to fear. But what I have suffered since I have been incapable of writing, and have felt my hoard of gold shrink and diminish in my hand like the Magic Skin of Balzac, is frightful. Now you understand me, do you not? and you will no longer bid me take care of myself. No; if you still pray to God, ask him to send me speedily to the undertaker's."

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Fifteen days later some thirty of us followed the hearse which carried Louis Miraz to the Cemetery Montmartre. It had snowed the day before, and Doctor Arnould, the old frequenter of painters' studios, the friend

and physician of the dead man, walking behind me, called in his brusque voice,

"Very commonplace, but always terrible the contrast: a burial in the snow—black on white. The Funeral of the Poor, by the late Vigneron, isn't to be ridiculed. Brr!"

At last we came to the edge of the grave. The place and the time were sad. Under a cloudy sky the little yew-trees, swayed by the wind, threw down their burdens of melted snow. The by-standers had formed a circle, and were watching the grave-diggers, who were lowering the coffin by cords. Near a cross-bearer, whose short surplice permitted the bottom of his trousers to be seen, the priest waited with a finger in his book; and, having grasped the rim of his hat under his left arm, the orator of the Society of Men of Letters already held in his black-gloved hand the funeral oration, hastily patched up by the aid of a comrade over a couple of glasses at the corner of a café table.

Suddenly, as the priest began his Latin prayers, Doctor Arnould seized me by the arm and whispered in my ear,

"You know that he killed himself?"

I looked at him with astonishment. But he pointed to the group in black, composed of Madame Miraz and her daughter, who were sobbing under their long veils and clasping each other in a tragic embrace, and he added,

"For them. Yes, for six months he threw all his medicines in the fire, and designedly committed all sorts of imprudences. He confessed it to me before his death. I had not understood it at all—I, who had expected to prolong his life at least three years by creosote. At last the other night, when it was freezing cold, he left his window open, as if by forgetfulness, and was taken with bleeding at the lungs. Yes, that he might leave bread for those two women. The curé does not dream that he is blessing a

suicide. But what of it, my good fellow? Miraz is in the paradise of the brave. The details of such a death. Eh? It is tougher than the passage of the Bridge of Arcole."

A DRAMATIC FUNERAL.

For twenty-five years he had played the role of the villain at the Boulevard du Crime,* and his harsh voice, his nose like an eagle's beak, his eye with its savage glitter, had made him a good player of such parts. For twenty-five years, dressed in the cloak and encircled by the fawn-colored leather belt of Mordaunt, he had retreated with the step of a wounded scorpion before the sword of D'Artagnan; draped in the dirty Jewish gown of Rodin, he had rubbed his dry

*A nickname given to the Boulevard du Temple, on account of the numerous melodramatic theatres situated there.

hands together, muttering the terrible "Patience, patience!" and, curled on the chair of the Duc d'Este, he had said to Lucretia Borgia, with a sufficiently infernal glance, "Take care and make no mistake. The flagon of gold, madame." When, preceded by a tremolo, he made his entry in the scene, the third gallery trembled, and a sigh of relief greeted the moment when the first walking gentleman at last said to him: "Between us two, now," and immolated him for the grand triumph of virtue.

But this sort of success, which is only betrayed by murmurs of horror, is not of the kind to make a dramatic career seductive; and besides the old actor had always hidden in a corner of his heart the bucolic ideal which is in the heart of almost all artists. He sighed for an old age of leisure, and the

comfortable dignity of a retired shopkeeper; the house in the country, where he could live with his family, with melons, under an arbor; cakes and wine in the winter evenings; his daughter a scholar in a convent; his son in the uniform of the Polytechnique; and the cross of the Legion.

Now, when we had occasion to know him, he had already nearly realized his dreams.

After the failure of the theatre where he had been for a long time engaged, some capitalists had thought of him to put the enterprise on its feet again. With his systematic habits, his good sense, his thorough and practical knowledge of the business, and a sufficiently correct literary instinct, he became an excellent manager. He was the owner of stocks and a villa at Montmorency; his son was a student at Sainte-Barbe, and his daughter had just come out of Les Oiseaux; and if the malice of small newspapers had retarded his nomination in the

Legion of Honor by recalling every year, about the first of January, his old ranting on the stage, when he played formerly the villains' parts, he could yet hope that it would not be long before the red ribbon would flourish in his button-hole. He had still preserved some of the habits of a strolling player, such as being very familiar with everybody, and dyeing his mustaches; but as he was, on the whole, good, honest, and serviceable, he conquered the esteem and friendship of those with whom he came in contact.

So it was with sincere grief that the whole dramatic world learned one day the terrible sorrow which had smitten that excellent man. His daughter, a girl of seventeen, had died suddenly of brain-fever.

We knew how he adored the child; how he had brought her up in the strictest principles of family and religion, far from the theatre, something as Triboulet hid his daughter Blanche in the little house of the cul-de-

sac Bucy. We understood that all the hopes and ambitions of the man rested on the head of that charming girl, who, near all the corruption of the theatre, had grown up in innocence and purity, as one sees sometimes in the scanty grass of the faubourgs a field-flower spring up by the door of a hovel.

We were among the first at the funeral, to which we had been summoned by a black-bordered billet.

A crowd of the people of the neighborhood encumbered the street before the house of the dead, attracted by the pomps of the first-class funeral ordered by the old come-

dian, who had preserved the taste of the *mise en scène* even in his grief. The magnificent hearse and cumbrous mourning-coaches were already drawn up to the sidewalk, and under the door, and in the shade of the heavy fringed and silvered draperies, amid the twinkling of burning candles, between two priests reading prayers in their Prayer-books, the form of the massive coffin could be seen under its white cloth, covered with Parma violets.

As we walked among the crowd we noticed the groups formed of those who, like us, were waiting the departure of the cortége. There were almost all the actors, men and women, of Paris, who had come to pay their last respects to the daughter of their comrade. Undoubtedly nothing could be more natural; but we experienced not the less a strange sensation on seeing, around the coffin of that pure young girl who had breathed away her last breath in a prayer,

the gathering of all those faces marked by the brand of the theatre.

They were all there: the stars, the comedians, the lovers, the traitors; nobody was

lacking: soubrettes, duennas, coquettes, first walking ladies. Wearing a sack-coat and a felt hat on his long gray hair, the superb adventurer of all the cloak and sword dramas

leaned against the shutter of a shop in his familiar attitude, and crossed his arms to show his handsome hands; while a little old fellow with the wrinkled face of a clown spoke to him briskly in the broad, harsh voice which had so often made us explode with laughter. By the side of the aged first young man, who, pinched in his scanty frock-coat, and with trousers trailing under foot, twirled in his gloved hands his locks of over-black hair, stood a great handsome fellow, beautiful as a model, who had not been able to renounce even for that day his eccentricities of costume, and strutted in a black velvet cape and the boots of an equerry. Oh, how sad, tired, and old they seemed in the gray light of that winter morning, all those pathetic heads, graceful or laughable, which we were only in the habit of seeing when transfigured by the prestige of the stage. Chins had become blue-black under too frequent shaving; hair

thin and dry under the hot iron of the hair-dresser; skins rough under the injurious action of unguents and vinegar; eyes dull, burned by the glare of foot-lights —blinded, almost fixed, like those of an owl in the sunlight.

The women were especially to be pitied. Obliged by the occasion to rise at a very early hour, and not having had the time for a careful and minute toilet, they gathered in groups of four or five, chilled and shivering in their fur mantles, muffs, and triple black veils. Notwithstanding the hasty rouge and powder of the morning, they were unrecognizable, and it required an effort of imagination to find in them a memory of that sublime seraglio of the Parisian theatres,

exposed every evening to the desires of several thousand men. On all of these charming types appeared the mark of weariness and age. Some ossified into faded skele-

tons, others grew dull with an unhealthy weight of fat; wrinkles crossed the foreheads and starred the temples; lips were livid and eyes circled with dark rings; the

complexions were particularly frightful—that uniform tint, morbid and sickly, the work of rouge and grease-paints. That heavy woman, with the head and neck of a farmer's wife (one almost sees a basket on her shoulder), is the terrible and fatal queen of grand, romantic dramas; and that small blonde and pale creature, so faded under her laces, and who would have completely filled a music-teacher's carrying roll, was the artless young woman whom all the vaudevillists married at the dénouement of their pieces. There were the dying glances of the lorette in the hospital, the pose of the old copyist of the Louvre, and the theatrical sneer.

Soon the cabs drove up with the functionaries connected with the administration of the theatre, in black hats and coats, with an official air of sadness; young reporters, the outflow of journalism, staring at everybody and taking notes; dramatic authors, Monday feuilletonists—in short, all of those

nocturnal beings, tired and worn-out, who are properly called the actives of Paris.

The groups became more compact, and talked animatedly. Old friends found each other; they shook hands, and, in view of the circumstances, smiled cordially, while the women saluted each other through their veils.

In passing, we could catch fragments of conversation like this:

"When will the affair begin?"

"Were you at the opening of the Variétès yesterday?"

Theatrical terms were heard—"My talents," "My charms," "My physique." Some business, even, was done. A new manager was quite surrounded; an old actress organized her benefit.

Suddenly there was a movement in the crowd. The undertaker's men had just placed the coffin in the hearse, and the young girls of the Sisterhood of the Virgin,

to which the dead girl had belonged, arranged themselves in two lines, in their white veils, at the sides of the funeral-car. Preceded by the master of ceremonies, in silk stockings and a wand of office in his hand, the poor father appeared on the pavement in full mourning, with a white cravat, broken down by grief and sustained by his friends.

The procession set out and came to the parish church, fortunately near.

There was a grand mass, with music which was not finished. It was too warm in the church stuffed with people, and the inattention was general. Men who recognized each other saluted with a light movement of the head; conversation was exchanged in a low voice; some young actors struck attitudes for the benefit of the women, and the pious responded to Dominus Vobiscum droned by the priest. At the elevation, from behind the altar, rang out a magnificent Pié Jesu, sung

by a celebrated baritone, who had never put in his voice so much amorous languor. Outside the church-yard the small boys of the quarter stood on tiptoe, and, hanging on to the railings, pointed out the celebrities with their fingers.

The office finished, the long defile commenced; and every one went to the entrance of the church to sprinkle some drops of holy-water on the bier, and press the hand of the old actor, who, broken by grief, and having hardly strength to hold his hat, leaned against a pillar.

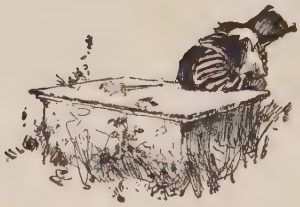
That was the most horrible moment.

Carried away by the habit of playing up to the situation, all these theatrical people put into the token of sympathy which they gave to their friend the character of their employment. The star advanced gravely, and with a three-quarter inclination of his head flashed out the "Look of Fate." The old tragedian with a gray beard assumed a sto-

ical expression, and did not forget to "vibrate" in pronouncing a masculine "Courage!" The clown approached with a short, trotting step, and shaking his head until his cheeks trembled, he murmured, "My poor old fellow." And the fairy queen, with the sensibility of a sensitive female, threw herself impulsively on the neck of the unhappy father, who, with swollen face, bloodshot eyes, and hanging lip, blackened his face and his gloved hands with the dye of his mustache, diluted by tears.

And all the time, a few steps from this grotesque and sinister scene, we could see—last word of this antithesis—the white figures of the young girls of the sisterhood, kneeling on the chairs nearest the coffin of their companion, and who undoubtedly were beseeching God, in their naïve and original prayers, to grant her the paradise of their dreams: a pretty paradise in the Jesuitical style, all in carved and gilded wood, and

many-colored marble, where one could see at the end a tableau in a transparent light; the Virgin crowned with stars, with a serpent under her feet, while little cherubs suspended in mid-air over her head an azure streamer flaming with these words: "*Ecce Regina Angelorum.*"



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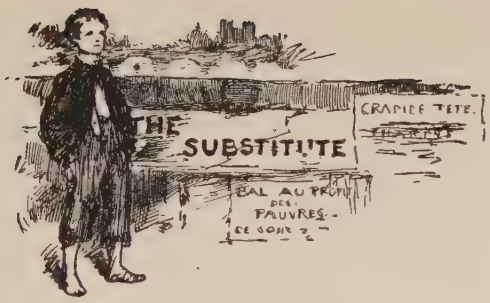


He was scarcely ten years old when he was first arrested as a vagabond.

He spoke thus to the judge:

"I am called Jean François Leturc, and for six months I was with the man who sings and plays upon a cord of catgut between the lanterns at the Place de la Bastille. I sang the refrain with him, and after that I called, 'Here's all the new songs, ten centimes, two sous!' He was always drunk, and used to beat me. That is why the police picked me up the other night. Before

that I was with the man who sells brushes. My mother was a laundress; her name was Adéle. At one time she lived with a man on the ground-floor at Montmartre. She was a good work-woman and liked me. She made money because she had for customers waiters in the cafés, and they use a good deal of linen. On Sundays she used to put me to bed early so that she could go to the ball. On week-days she sent me to Les Fréres, where I learned to read. Well, the sergeant-de-ville whose beat was in our street used always to stop before our windows to talk with her—a good-looking chap, with a medal from the Crimea. They were married, and after that everything went wrong. He didn't take to me, and turned mother against me. Every one had a blow for me, and so, to get out of the house, I spent whole days in the Place Clichy, where I knew the mountebanks. My father-in-law lost his place, and my mother her work. She used

to go out washing to take care of him; this gave her a cough — the steam. . . . She is dead at Lamboisière. She was a good woman. Since that I have lived with the seller of brushes and the catgut scraper. Are you going to send me to prison?"

He said this openly, cynically, like a man. He was a little ragged street-arab, as tall as a boot, his forehead hidden under a queer mop of yellow hair.

Nobody claimed him, and they sent him to the Reform School.

Not very intelligent, idle, clumsy with his hands, the only trade he could learn there was not a good one—that of reseating straw chairs. However, he was obedient, naturally quiet and silent, and he did not seem to be profoundly corrupted by that school of vice. But when, in his seventeenth year, he was thrown out again on the streets of Paris, he unhappily found there his prison comrades, all great scamps, exercising their dirty pro-

fessions: teaching dogs to catch rats in the the sewers, and blacking shoes on ball nights in the passage of the Opera—amateur wrestlers, who permitted themselves to be thrown by the Hercules of the booths—or fishing at noontime from rafts; all of these occupations he followed to some extent, and, some months after he came out of the house of correction, he was arrested again for a petty theft—a pair of old shoes prigged from a shop-window. Result: a year in the prison of Sainte Pélagie, where he served as valet to the political prisoners.

He lived in much surprise among this group of prisoners, all very young, negligent in dress, who talked in loud voices, and carried their heads in a very solemn fashion. They used to meet in the cell of one of the oldest of them, a fellow of some thirty years, already a long time in prison and quite a fixture at Sainte Pélagie—a large cell, the walls covered with colored caricatures, and

from the window of which one could see all Paris—its roofs, its spires, and its domes—and far away the distant line of hills, blue and indistinct upon the sky. There were upon the walls some shelves filled with volumes and all the old paraphernalia of a fencing-room: broken masks, rusty foils, breast-plates, and gloves that were losing their tow. It was there that the "politicians" used to dine together, adding to the everlasting "soup and beef," fruit, cheese, and pints of wine which Jean François went out and got by the can—a tumultuous repast interrupted by violent disputes, and where, during the dessert, the "Carmagnole" and "Ca Ira" were sung in full chorus. They assumed, however, an air of great dignity on those days when a newcomer was brought in among them, at first entertaining him gravely as a citizen, but on the morrow using him with affectionate familiarity, and calling him by his nickname. Great words were used there: Corporation,

Responsibility, and phrases quite unintelligible to Jean François—such as this, for example, which he once heard imperiously put forth by a frightful little hunchback who blotted some writing-paper every night:

"It is done. This is the composition of the Cabinet: Raymond, the Bureau of Public Instruction; Martial, the Interior; and for Foreign Affairs, myself."

His time done, he wandered again around Paris, watched afar by the police, after the fashion of cockchafers, made by cruel children to fly at the end of a string. He became one of those fugitive and timid beings whom the law, with a sort of coquetry, arrests and releases by turn—something like those platonic fishers who, in order that they may not exhaust their fish-pond, throw immediately back in the water the fish which has just come out of the net. Without a suspicion on his part that so much honor had been done to so sorry a subject, he had

a special bundle of memoranda in the mysterious portfolios of the Rue de Jérusalem. His name was written in round hand on the gray paper of the cover, and the notes and reports, carefully classified, gave him his successive appellations: "Name, Leturc;" "the prisoner Leturc," and, at last, "the criminal Leturc."

He was two years out of prison, dining where he could, sleeping in night lodging-houses and sometimes in lime-kilns, and taking part with his fellows in interminable games of pitch-penny on the boulevards near the barriers. He wore a greasy cap on the back of his head, carpet slippers, and a short white blouse. When he had five sous he had his hair curled. He danced at Constant's at Montparnasse; bought for two sous to sell for four at the door of Bobino, the jack of hearts or the ace of clubs serving as a countermark; sometimes opened the door of a carriage; led horses

to the horse-market. From the lottery of all sorts of miserable employments he drew a goodly number. Who can say if the atmosphere of honor which one breathes as a soldier, if military discipline might not have saved him. Taken, in a cast of the net, with some young loafers who robbed drunkards sleeping on the streets, he denied very earnestly having taken part in their expeditions. Perhaps he told the truth, but his antecedents were accepted in lieu of proof, and he was sent for three years to Poissy. There he made coarse playthings for children, was tattooed on the chest, learned thieves' slang and the penal-code. A new liberation, and a new plunge into the sink of Paris; but very short this time, for at the end of six months at the most he was again compromised in a night robbery, aggravated by climbing and breaking—a serious affair, in which he played an obscure role, half dupe and half fence. On the whole his complicity

was evident, and he was sent for five years at hard labor. His grief in this adventure was above all in being separated from an old dog which he had found on a dung-heap, and cured of the mange. The beast loved him.

Toulon, the ball and chain, the work in the harbor, the blows from a stick, wooden shoes on bare feet, soup of black beans dating from Trafalgar, no tobacco money, and the terrible sleep in a camp swarming with convicts; that was what he experienced for five broiling summers and five winters raw with the Mediterranean wind. He came out from there stunned, was sent under surveillance to Vernon, where he worked some time on the river. Then, an incorrigible vagabond, he broke his exile and came again to Paris. He had his savings, fifty-six francs, that is to say, time enough for reflection. During his absence his former wretched companions had dispersed. He was well

hidden, and slept in a loft at an old woman's, to whom he represented himself as a sailor, tired of the sea, who had lost his papers in a recent shipwreck, and who wanted to try his hand at something else. His tanned face and his calloused hands, together with some sea phrases which he dropped from time to time, made his tale seem probable enough.

One day when he risked a saunter in the streets, and when chance had led him as far as Montmartre, where he was born, an unexpected memory stopped him before the door of Les Frères, where he had learned to read. As it was very warm the door was open, and by a single glance the passing outcast was able to recognize the peaceable

school-room. Nothing was changed: neither the bright light shining in at the great windows, nor the crucifix over the desk, nor the rows of benches with the tables furnished with ink-stands and pencils, nor the table of weights and measures, nor the map where pins stuck in still indicated the operations of some ancient war. Heedlessly and without thinking, Jean François read on the blackboard the words of the Evangelist which had been set there as a copy:

"Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."

It was undoubtedly the hour for recreation, for the Brother Professor had left his chair, and, sitting on the edge of a table, he was telling a story to the boys who surrounded him with eager and attentive eyes. What a bright and innocent face he had, that beardless young man, in his long black

gown, and white necktie, and great ugly shoes, and his badly cut brown hair streaming out behind! All the simple figures of the children of the people who were watching him seemed scarcely less childlike than his; above all when, delighted with some of his own simple and priestly pleasantries, he broke out in an open and frank peal of laughter which showed his white and regular teeth, a peal so contagious that all the scholars laughed loudly in their turn. It was such a sweet, simple group in the bright sunlight, which lighted their dear eyes and their blond curls.

Jean François looked at them for some time in silence, and for the first time in that savage nature, all instinct and appetite, there awoke a mysterious, a tender emotion. His heart, that seared and hardened heart, unmoved when the convict's cudgel or the heavy whip of the watchman fell on his shoulders, beat oppressively. In that sight

he saw again his infancy; and closing his eyes sadly, the prey to torturing regret, he walked quickly away.

Then the words written on the blackboard came back to his mind.

"If it wasn't too late, after all!" he murmured; "if I could again, like others, eat honestly my brown bread, and sleep my fill without nightmare! The spy must be sharp who recognizes me. My beard, which I shaved off down there, has grown out thick and strong. One can burrow somewhere in the great ant-hill, and work can be found. Whoever is not worked to death in the hell of the galleys comes out agile and robust, and I learned there to climb ropes with loads upon my back. Building is going on everywhere here, and the masons need helpers. Three francs a day! I never earned so much. Let me be forgotten, and that is all I ask."

He followed his courageous resolution; he

was faithful to it, and after three months he was another man. The master for whom he worked called him his best workman. After a long day upon the scaffolding, in the hot sun and the dust, constantly bending and raising his back to take the hod from the man at his feet and pass it to the man over his head, he went for his soup to the cook-shop, tired out, his legs aching, his hands burning, his eyelids stuck with plaster, but content with himself, and carrying his well-earned money in a knot in his handkerchief. He went out now without fear, since he could not be recognized in his white mask, and since he had noticed that the suspicious glances of the policeman were seldom turned on the tired workman. He was quiet and sober. He slept the sound sleep of fatigue. He was free!

At last — oh, supreme recompense! — he had a friend!

He was a fellow-workman like himself,

named Savinien, a little peasant with red lips who had come to Paris with his stick over his shoulder and a bundle on the end of it, fleeing from the wine-shops and going to mass every Sunday. Jean François loved him for his piety, for his candor, for his honesty, for all that he himself had lost, and so long ago. It was a passion, profound and unrestrained, which transformed him by fatherly cares and attentions. Savinien, himself of a weak and egotistical nature, let things take their course, satisfied only in finding a companion who shared his horror of the wine-shop. The two friends lived together in a fairly comfortable lodging, but their resources were very limited. They were obliged to take into their room a third companion, an old Auvergnat, gloomy and rapacious, who found it possible out of his meagre salary to save something with which to buy a place in his own country. Jean François and Savinien were always together.

On holidays they together took long walks in the environs of Paris, and dined under an arbor in one of those small country inns where there are a great many mushrooms in the sauces and innocent rebusses on the napkins. There Jean François learned from his friend all that lore of which they who are born in the city are ignorant: learned the names of the trees, the flowers, and the plants; the various seasons for harvesting; he heard eagerly the thousand details of a laborious country life—the autumn sowing, the winter chores, the splendid celebrations of harvest and vintage days, the sound of the mills at the water-side, and the flails striking the ground, the tired horses led to water, and the hunting in the morning mist; and, above all, the long evenings around the fire of vine-shoots, that were shortened by some marvellous stories. He discovered in himself a source of imagination before unknown, and found a singular

delight in the recital of events so placid, so calm, so monotonous.

One thing troubled him, however: it was the fear lest Savinien might learn something of his past. Sometimes there escaped from him some low word of thieves' slang, a vulgar gesture—vestiges of his former horrible existence—and he felt the pain one feels when old wounds re-open; the more because he fancied that he sometimes saw in Savinien the awakening of an unhealthy curiosity. When the young man, already tempted by the pleasures which Paris offers to the poorest, asked him about the mysteries of the great city, Jean François feigned ignorance and turned the subject; but he felt a vague inquietude for the future of his friend.

His uneasiness was not without foundation. Savinien could not long remain the simple rustic that he was on his arrival in Paris. If the gross and noisy pleasures of the wine-shop always repelled him, he was

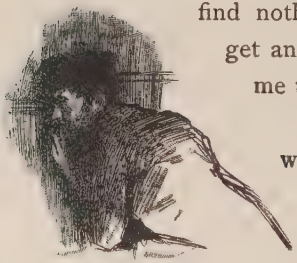
profoundly troubled by other temptations, full of danger for the inexperience of his twenty years. When spring came he began to go off alone, and at first he wandered about the brilliant entrance of some dancing-hall, watching the young girls who went in with their arms around each others' waists, talking in low tones. Then, one evening, when lilacs perfumed the air and the call to quadrilles was most captivating, he crossed the threshold, and from that time Jean François observed a change, little by little, in his manners and his visage. He became more frivolous, more extravagant. He often borrowed from his friend his scanty savings, and he forgot to repay. Jean François, feeling that he was abandoned, jealous and forgiving at the same time, suffered and was silent. He felt that he had no right to reproach him, but with the foresight of affection he indulged in cruel and inevitable presentiments.

One evening, as he was mounting the stairs to his room, absorbed in his thoughts, he heard, as he was about to enter, the sound of angry voices, and he recognized that of the old Auvergnat who lodged with Savinien and himself. An old habit of suspicion made him stop at the landing-place and listen to learn the cause of the trouble.

"Yes," said the Auvergnat, angrily, "I am sure that some one has opened my trunk and stolen from it the three louis that I had hidden in a little box; and he who has done this thing must be one of the two companions who sleep here, if it were not the servant Maria. It concerns you as much as it does me, since you are the master of the house, and I will drag you to the courts if you do not let me at once break open the valises of the two masons. My poor gold! It was here yesterday in its place, and I will tell you just what it was, so that if we find it again nobody can accuse me of having

lied. Ah, I know them, my three beautiful gold pieces, and I can see them as plainly as I see you! One piece was more worn than the others; it was of greenish gold, with a portrait of the great emperor. The other was a great old fellow with a queue and epaulettes; and the third, which had on it a Philippe with whiskers, I had marked with my teeth. They don't trick me. Do you know that I only wanted two more like that to pay for my vineyard? Come, search these fellows' things with me, or I will call the police! Hurry up!"

"All right," said the voice of the landlord; "we will go and search with Maria. So much the worse for you if we find nothing, and the masons get angry. You have forced me to it."



Jean François' soul was full of fright. He remembered the em-

barrassed circumstances and the small loans of Savinien, and how sober he had seemed for some days. And yet he could not believe that he was a thief. He heard the Auvergnat panting in his eager search, and he pressed his closed fists against his breast as if to still the furious beating of his heart.

"Here they are!" suddenly shouted the victorious miser. "Here they are, my louis, my dear treasure; and in the Sunday vest of that little hypocrite of Limousin! Look, landlord, they are just as I told you. Here is the Napoleon, the man with a queue, and the Philippe that I have bitten. See the dents? Ah, the little beggar with the sanctified air. I should have much sooner suspected the other. Ah, the wretch! Well, he must go to the convict prison."

At this moment Jean François heard the well-known step of Savinien coming slowly up the stairs.

He is going to his destruction, thought he. Three stories. I have time!

And, pushing open the door, he entered the room, pale as death, where he saw the landlord and the servant stupefied in a corner, while the Auvergnat, on his knees, in the disordered heap of clothes, was kissing the pieces of gold.

"Enough of this," he said, in a thick voice; "I took the money, and put it in my comrade's trunk. But that is too bad. I am a thief, but not a Judas. Call the police; I will not try to escape, only I must say a word to Savinien in private. Here he is."

In fact, the little Limousin had just arrived, and seeing his crime discovered, believing himself lost, he stood there, his eyes fixed, his arms hanging.

Jean François seized him forcibly by the neck, as if to embrace him; he put his mouth close to Savinien's ear, and said to him in a low, supplicating voice,

"Keep quiet."

Then turning towards the others:

"Leave me alone with him. I tell you I won't go away. Lock us in if you wish, but leave us alone."

With a commanding gesture he showed them the door.

They went out.

Savinien, broken by grief, was sitting on the bed, and lowered his eyes without understanding anything.

"Listen," said Jean François, who came and took him by the hands. "I understand! You have stolen three gold pieces to buy some trifle for a girl. That costs six months in prison. But one only comes out from there to go back again, and you will become a pillar of police courts and tribunals. I understand it. I have been seven years at the Reform School, a year at Sainte Pélagie, three years at Poissy, five years at Toulon. Now, don't be afraid. Everything is arranged. I have taken it on my shoulders."

"It is dreadful," said Savinien; but hope was springing up again in his cowardly heart.

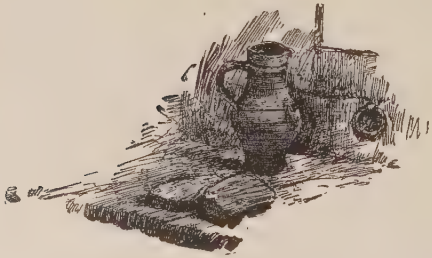
"When the elder brother is under the flag, the younger one does not go," replied Jean François. "I am your substitute, that's all. You care for me a little, do you not? I am paid. Don't be childish—don't refuse. They would have taken me again one of these days, for I am a runaway from exile. And then, do you see, that life will be less

hard for me than for you. I know it all, and I shall not complain if I have not done you this service for nothing, and if you swear to me that you will never do it again. Savinien, I have loved you well, and your friendship has made me happy. It is through it that, since I have known you, I have been honest and pure, as I might always have been, perhaps, if I had had, like you, a father to put a tool in my hands, a mother to teach me my prayers. It was my sole regret that I was useless to you, and that I deceived you concerning myself. To-day I have unmasked in saving you. It is all right. Do not cry, and embrace me, for already I hear heavy boots on the stairs. They are coming with the *posse*, and we must not seem to know each other so well before those chaps."

He pressed Savinien quickly to his breast, then pushed him from him, when the door was thrown wide open.

It was the landlord and the Auvergnat, who brought the police. Jean François sprang forward to the landing-place, held out his hands for the handcuffs, and said, laughing, "Forward, bad lot!"

To-day he is at Cayenne, condemned for life as an incorrigible.



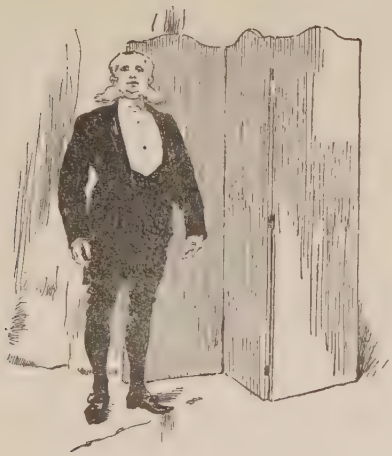
AT TABLE.

WHEN the *maître d'hôtel* — oh, what a respectable paunch in an ample kerseymere vest! What a worthy and red face, well framed by white whiskers! (an English physique, I assure you) — when the imposing *maître d'hôtel* opened with two raps the door of the salon, and announced in his musical bass voice, at the same time sonorous and respectful, "The dinner of madame la comtesse is served," hats were hung on the

corners of brackets, while the more distinguished of the guests offered their arms to the ladies, and all passed into the dining-room, silent, almost meditative, like a procession.

The table glittered. What flowers! What lights! Each guest found his place without difficulty. As soon as he had read his name on the glazed card, a grand lackey in silk stockings pushed gently behind him a luxurious chair embroidered with a count's coronet. Fourteen at the table, not more: four young women in full toilets, and ten men belonging to the aristocracy of blood or of merit, who had put on that evening all their orders in honor of a foreign diplomat sitting at the right hand of the mistress of the house. Clusters of jewelled decorations hung from button-holes, plaques of diamonds glittered in the lapel of one or two black coats, a heavy commander's cross sparkled on the starched front of a general with a

red cravat. As to the ladies, they bore all the splendors of their jewel-boxes.



An elegant and exquisite reunion! What an atmosphere of good-living in the high hall—splendidly decorated and ornamented on its four panels with studies for a dining-hall in the fine style of olden days—where

were fruits, venison, and eatables of all sorts. The service of the table was noiseless; the domestics seemed to glide upon the thick carpet. The butler whispered the wines in the ears of the guests with a confidential tone, and as if he were revealing a secret upon which life depended.

At the soup — a *consommé* at the same time mild and stimulating, giving force and youthful vigor to the digestion — chat between neighbors began. Undoubtedly these were the merest trifles that were at first so low spoken. But what politeness in the grave gestures! What affability in looks and smiles! Soon after the Chateâu-yquem, wit sparkled. These men, for the most part old or very mature, all remarkable through birth or through talent, had lived much; full of experience and memories, they were made for conversation, and the beauty of the women present inspired them with a desire to shine, and excited them to a courteous rival-

ry. There was a snapping of bright words, a flight of sudden sallies, and the conversationalists broke into groups of two or three. A famous voyager with bronzed skin, recently returned from the farthest deserts, told his two neighbors of an elephant hunt, without any boasting, with as much tranquillity as though he were speaking of shooting rabbits. Farther off, the fine profile and white hair of an illustrious savant was gallantly inclined towards the comtesse, who listened to him laughing — a very slender blonde, her eyes young and intent, with a collar of splendid emeralds on a bosom like a professional beauty, and the neck and shoulders of the Venus de Medici.

Decidedly the dinner promised to be charming as well as sumptuous. Ennui, that too frequent guest at mundane feasts, would not come to sit at that table. These fortunate ones were going to pass a deli-

cious hour, drinking enjoyment through every pore, by every sense.

Now, at that same table, at the lower end, in the most modest place, a man still young, the least qualified, the most obscure of all who were there, a man of reverie and imagination, one of those dreamers in whom is something of philosophy, something of poetry, sat silent.

Admitted into that high society by virtue of his renown as an artist, one of nature's aristocrats but without vanity, sprung from the people and not forgetting it, he breathed voluptuously that flower of civilization which is called good company.

He knew—none better than he—how everything in this environment—the charm of the women, the wit of the men, the glittering table, the furnishing of the hall, to the exquisite wine which he had just touched to his lips—how everything was choice and rare, and he rejoiced that a concourse of things so lovely and so harmonious existed. He was plunged in a bath of optimism; it seemed to him good that there should be, sometimes and somewhere in the weary world, beings almost happy. Provided that they were accessible to pity, charitable—and these happy people probably were that—who could distress them? what could injure them? Ah, beautiful and consoling chimera to believe that for such as these life is pleasant; that they retain always — or almost always — that gay, happy light in the eye, that half-blossomed smile upon the lips; that they have blotted out, as far as possible, from their existence, imperious

and discreditable desires and abject infirmities.

He whom we will call the Dreamer was pursuing that train of thought, when the *maître d'hôtel*—the superb *maître d'hôtel*—entered with solemnity, carrying in a great silver plate a turbot of fabulous dimensions—one of those phenomenal fish which are only seen in the old paintings representing the miraculous draught of fish, or perhaps in the window of Chevet, before a row of astonished street-boys who flatten their noses against the glass window.

Dinner is served. But when the Dreamer had before him on his plate a portion of the monstrous turbot, the light odor of the sea evoked in his mind, prone to unexpected suggestions, that corner of Breton, that poor village of sailors, where he had been belated the other autumn until the equinox, and where he had rendered assistance in some

dreadful storms. He suddenly called to mind that terrible night when the fishing-boats could not come back to port, the night that he had passed on the mole amid a group of frightened women, standing where the sea-spray streamed down his face, and the cold and furious wind seemed striving to tear his clothes from his back. What a life was theirs, those poor men! Down there how many widows, young and old, wearing always the black shawl, went at break of day, with their swarms of children, to earn their bread — oh, nothing but bread!—working in the sickening smell of hot oil in the sardine factories! He saw again in memory the church above the village, half-way up the cliff, the steeple painted white to show to the distant boats the passage between the reefs; and he saw, also, in the short grass of the cemetery nibbled by the sheep, the gravestones on which this sinister inscription was so often

repeated: "*Lost at sea.*" "*Lost at sea.*" "*Lost at sea.*"

The enormous turbot was of savory and delicate taste, and the shrimp sauce with which it was served proved that the *chef* of the comte had followed a course in cooking at the Café Anglais and profited by it. For our refined civilization reaches even this point. One takes degrees in culinary science. There are doctors in roasts and bachelors in sauces. All of the guests eat as if they appreciated, and with delicate gestures, but without showing special favor for exceptional dishes, through good form and because they were habituated to exquisite food.

The Dreamer himself had no appetite. He was still in thought with the Bretons, with the sons of the sea, who had caught, perhaps, this magnificent turbot. He remembered the day that followed the tempest—that morning, rainy and gray—when, walking by

the heavy, leaden sea, he had found a body at his feet and recognized it as that of an old sailor, the father of a family, who had been lost at sea three days before—mournful jetsam, stranded in the wrack and foam, so heart-rending to see, with the gray hair of the drowned full of sand and shells!

A shudder passed over his heart.

But the lackeys had already removed the plates; every trace of the giant fish had disappeared, and while they were serving another course, the diners, elegant triflers, had taken up their chat again. Hunger being already somewhat appeased, they were more animated, they spoke with more abandon — light laughs ran round. Oh, charming and gracious company!

Then the Dreamer, the silent guest, was seized with an

infinite sadness; for all the work and distress that were required to create this comfort and well-being came surging on his imagination.

That these men of the world might wear light dress-coats in mid-December, that these women might expose their arms and their shoulders, the temperature of the room was that of a spring morning. And who furnished the coal? The poor devils of the black country, the subterranean workmen who lived in hellish mines. How white and fresh is the complexion of that young woman against her corsage of pink satin! But who had woven that satin? The human spider of Lyons, the weaver, always at his trade in the leprous houses of the Croix Rousse. She wears in her tiny ears two beautiful pearls. What brilliancy! what opaline transparence! Almost perfect spheres! The pearl which Cleopatra dissolved in vinegar and swallowed, and which was worth

ten thousand sesterces, was not more pure. But does she know, that young woman, that in far-off Ceylon, on the pearl-oyster banks of Arripo and Condatchy, the Indians of the Indian Company plunge heroically down in twelve fathoms of water, one foot in the heavy stone weight which drags them down to the bottom, a knife in the left hand for defence against the shark?

But what of that? One is lovely and coquettish. The air of the dining-hall is warm and perfumed. There one can dine gaily, adorned and half nude, flirting with one's neighbors. What has one to do, I ask you, with a dark workman, who digs fifty feet under the ground, with a weaver sitting with stiffened joints before the loom, with a savage who emerges from the sea and sometimes reddens it with his blood? Why should one think of things so sad, so ugly? What an absurdity!

Meanwhile the Dreamer pursued his train of thought.

An instant ago, without taking thought, mechanically he crumbled on the cloth a bit of the gilded bread which was placed near his napkin. As a viand, a mere bit of fancy, insignificant in such a repast, it made him think of the *naïf* phrase of the great lady concerning the starving wretches — "Let them eat cake." Nevertheless, this little cake is bread all the same—bread made of flour, which in turn is made of wheat. Great heaven! yes, it is bread, simply bread, like the loaf of the peasant, like the bran-roll of the soldier; and that it might be here, on the table of the rich, required the patient labor of many poor.

The peasant labored, sowed, reaped. He pushed his plough or led his harrow across the fertile field, under the cold needles of the autumn rain; he started from sleep, full of terror for his crop, when it thundered by

night; he trembled, seeing the passage of great violet clouds charged with hail; he went forth, dissatisfied and gloomy, to the heavy work and exhausting labor of harvest.

And when the old miller, twisted by rheumatism which he has caught in the river fogs, has sent the flour to Paris, the market-porters with the great white hats have carried the crushing sacks on their broad backs, and last night, even, in the baker's cellar the workmen toiled until morning.

Verily, yes! It has cost all these efforts, all these pains—the bit of bread carelessly broken by the white hands of these patricians.

And now the incorrigible Dreamer was possessed by these things. The delicacies of the repast only recalled to him the suffering of humanity. Presently, when the butler poured for him a glass of Chambertin, did he not remember that certain glass-

blowers became consumptive through blowing bottles?

Let it pass—it is absurd. He well knows that so the world is made. An economist would have laughed in his face. Would he become a Socialist, perhaps? There will always be rich and poor, as there will always be well-formed men and hunchbacks.

Besides, the fortunates before him were not unjustly so. These were not vulgar favorites of the Gilded Calf—parvenus gross and conceited. The nobleman who presides at the table bears with honor and dignity a name associated with all the glories of France; the general with the gray mustache is a hero, and charged at Rezonville with the intrepidity of a Murat; the painter, the poet, have faithfully served Art and Beauty; the chemist, a self-made man who began life as a shop-boy in a drug-store, and to whom the learned world listens to-day as to an oracle, is simply a man of genius;

these high-born dames are generous and good, and they will often dip their fair hands courageously in the depth of misfortune. Why should not these members of the *élite* have exceptional enjoyment?

The Dreamer said to himself that he had been unjust. These were old sophisms—good, at the best, for the clubs of the faubourgs, which had been awakened in his memory, and by which he had been duped. Is it possible? He was ashamed of himself.

But the dinner neared its end; and while the lackeys refilled for the last time the champagne-glasses, the table grew silent—the guests felt the apathy of digestion. The Dreamer looked at them, one after the other, and all the faces had satiated, *blasé* expressions which disturbed and disquieted him. A sentiment, obscure, inexplicable, but so bitter! protested even from the depth of his soul against that repast; and when they

rose at last from the table, he repeated softly and stubbornly to himself:

"Yes; they are within their rights. But do they know, do they understand, that their luxury is made from many miseries? Do they think of it sometimes? Do they think of it as often as they should? Do they think of it?"

AN ACCIDENT.

I.

SAINT MÉDARD, the old church of the Rue Mouffetard, once well known as the scene of the Convulsionnaires, is a very poor parish. The "Faubourg Marceau," as they call it there, has not much religion, and the vestry-board must have hard work to make both ends meet. On Sundays, at the hours of service, there are but few there, and they are

for the most part women: some twenty of the folk of the quarter and some servants in their round caps. As for the men, there are not at the most more than three or four—old men in peasant jackets, who kneel awkwardly on the stone floor, near a pillar, their caps under their arms, rolling a great chaplet of beads between their fingers, moving their lips, and raising their eyes towards the arched roof, with an air as if they had given the stained-glass windows. On week days, nobody. On Thursdays, in the winter, the aisles resounded for an instant with the clang of wooden shoes, when the students of the catechism came and went. Sometimes a poor woman, leading one or two children and carrying a baby in her arms, came to burn a little candle on the stand at the chapel of the Virgin, or perhaps one heard by the baptismal font the wailing of a new-born babe; or, more often, the funeral of some poor wretch: a deal box, covered

with a black cloth and resting on two trestles, hastily blessed by the priest, before a little group of women, the men being free-thinkers, and waiting the conclusion of the ceremony in the drinking-shop across the way, where they played bagatelle for drinks.

Therefore, the old Abbé Faber, one of the vicars of the parish, is sure that twice out of three times he will find no penitent before his confessional, and has only to hear, for the most part of the time, the uninteresting confession of some good women. But he is conscientious, and on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, at seven o'clock precisely, he betakes himself regularly to the chapel of St. John, only to make a short prayer and return should there be nobody there.

II.

One day last winter, struggling against a heavy wind with his open umbrella, the Abbé

Faber toiled painfully up the Rue Mouffetard, on the way to his parish, and, almost certain that his toil was useless, he regretted to himself the warm fire he had just quitted in his little room in the Rue D'homond, and the folio *Bollandiste* which he had left lying on the table, with his eye-glasses on its open pages. But it was Saturday night, the day when certain old widows, who earned their scant income in the neighboring boarding-houses, sometimes sought absolution for the morrow's communion. The honest priest could not, therefore, excuse himself from entering his oak box and opening, with the punctuality of a cashier, that wicket where the devotees, for whom the confessional is a spiritual savings-bank, make a weekly deposit of their venial sins.

The Abbé Faber was the more sorry to go out, because that particular Saturday was pay-day, and on such occasions the Rue Mouffetard swarmed with people, and a peo-

ple not well disposed toward his cloth. However good a man one may be, it is far from agreeable to be forced to lower the eyes to avoid malevolent looks, and to stop the ears against insolent words heard in passing. There was a certain drinking-shop which the abbé particularly dreaded—a shop brilliant with gas and exhaling an odor of alcohol through its open doors, through which one could see a perspective of barrels labelled: "Absinthe," "Bitter," "Madère," "Vermouth," etc. Here, leaning against the bar, were always a band of loafers in long blouses and high hats, who saluted the poor abbé, walking quickly along the pavement, with ribald jests.

However, on this night the streets were deserted on account of the bad weather, and the abbé reached his church without interruption. He dipped his finger in the holy water, crossed himself, made a brief reverence before the grand altar, and went tow-

ards his confessional. At least he had not come for nothing. A penitent was waiting.

III.

A male penitent! a rare and exceptional thing at Saint Médard. But, distinguishing by the red light of the lamp hanging from the roof of the chapel the short white jacket and the heavy nailed shoes of the kneeling man, the Abbé Faber believed him to be some workman who had kept his rustic faith and his early habits of religious observance. Without doubt the confession that he was about to hear would be as stupid as that of the cook of the Rue Monge, who, after having accused himself of petty thefts, exclaimed loudly against a single word of restitution. The priest even smiled to himself as he remembered the formal confession of one of the inhabitants of the faubourg, who

came to ask for a billet of confession that he might marry. "I have neither killed or robbed. Ask me about the rest." And so the vicar entered very tranquilly into his confessional, and, after having taken a copious pinch of snuff, opened without emotion the little curtain of green serge which closed the wicket.

"Monsieur le curé," stammered a rough voice, which was making an effort to speak low.

"I am not a curé, my friend. Say your *confiteor*, and call me father."

The man, whose face the abbé could not see among the shadows, stumbled through the prayer, which he seemed to have great difficulty in recalling, and he began again in a hoarse whisper:

"Monsieur le curé—no—my father—excuse me if I do not speak properly, but I have not been to confession for twenty-five years—no, not since I quitted the country—

you know how it is—a man in Paris, and yet I have not been worse than other people, and I have said to myself, 'God must be a good sort of fellow.' But to-day what I have on my conscience is too heavy to carry alone, and you must hear me, monsieur le curé: I have killed a man!"

The abbé half rose from his seat. A murderer! There was no longer any question of his mind wandering from the duties of his office, of half annoyance at the garrulity of the old women, to whom he listened with a half attentive ear, and whom he absolved in all confidence. A murderer! That head which was so near his had conceived and planned such a crime! Those hands, crossed on the confessional, were perhaps still stained with blood! In his trouble, perhaps not unmixed with a certain amount of fear, the Abbé Faber could only speak mechanically.

"Confess yourself, my son. The mercy of God is infinite."

"Listen to my whole story," said the man, with a voice trembling with profound grief. "I am a workingman, and I came to Paris more than twenty years ago with a fellow-countryman, a companion from childhood. We robbed birds'-nests, and we learned to read in school together—almost a brother, sir. He was called Philip; I am called Jack, myself. He was a fine big fellow; I have always been heavy and ill-formed. There was never a better workman than he—while I am only a 'botcher'—and so generous and good-natured, wearing his heart on his sleeve. I was proud to be his friend, to walk by his side—proud when he clapped me on the back and called me a clumsy fellow. I loved him because I admired him, in fact. Once here, what an opportunity! We worked together for the same employer, but he left me alone in the evenings more than half the time. He preferred to amuse himself with his companions—natural enough, at his age. He

loved pleasure, he was free, he had no responsibilities. All this was impossible for me. I was forced to save my money, for at that time I had an invalid mother in the country, and I sent her all my savings. As for me, I stayed at the fruiterer's where I lodged, and who kept a lodging-house for masons. Philip did not dine there; he used to go somewhere else, and, to tell the truth, the dinners were not particularly good. But the fruiterer was a widow, far from happy, and I saw that my payments were of help to her; and then, to be frank, I fell at once in love with her daughter. Poor Catherine! You will soon know, monsieur le curé, what came from it all. I was there three years without daring to tell her of the love I had for her. I have told you that I am not a good workman, and the little that I gained hardly sufficed for me and for the support of my mother. There could be no thought of marrying. At last my good mother left this

world for a better. I was somewhat less pressed for money, and I began to save, and when it seemed to me that I had enough to begin with, I told Catherine of my love. She said nothing at first—neither yes nor no. Well, I knew that no one would fall upon my neck; I am not attractive. In the mean time Catherine consulted her mother, who thought well of me as a steady workman, as a good fellow, and the marriage was decided upon. Ah, I had some happy weeks! I saw that Catherine barely accepted me, and that she was by no means carried away with me; but as she had a good heart, I hoped that she would love me some day—I would make her love me. As a matter of course, I told everything to Philip, whom I saw every day at the work-yard, and as Catherine and I were engaged, I wanted him to meet her. Perhaps you have already guessed the end, monsieur le curé. Philip was handsome, lively, good-tempered—everything that I

was not; and without attempting it, innocently enough, he fascinated Catherine. Ah, Catherine had a frank and honest heart, and as soon as she recognized what had happened she at once told me everything. Ah,

I can never forget that moment! It was Catherine's birthday, and in honor of it I had bought a little cross of gold which I had arranged in a box with cotton. We were alone in the back shop, and she had just brought me my soup. I took my box from

my pocket, and, opening it, I showed her the jewel. Then she burst into tears.

"'Forgive me, Jack,' she said, 'and keep that for her whom you will marry. As for me, I can never become your wife. I love another—I love Philip.'

IV.

"Believe me, I had trouble enough then, monsieur le curé; my soul was full of it. But what could I do, since I loved them both? Only what I believed was for their happiness—let them marry. And as Philip had always lived freely, and spent as he made, I lent him my hoard to buy the furniture.

"Then they were married, and for a while all went well. They had a little boy, and I stood sponsor for him and named him Camille, in remembrance of his mother. It

was a little after the birth of the baby that Philip began to go wrong. I was mistaken in him—he was not made for marriage; he was too fond of frivolity and pleasure. You live in a poor quarter, monsieur le curé, and you must know the sad story by heart—the workman who glides little by little from idleness into drunkenness, who is off on a spree for two or three days, who does not bring home his week's wages, and who only returns to his home, broken up by his spree, to make scenes and to beat his wife. In less than two years Philip became one of these wretches. At first I tried to reform him, and sometimes, ashamed of himself, he would attempt to do better; but that did not last long. Then my remonstrances only irritated him; and when I went to his house, and he saw me look sadly around the chamber made bare by the pawn-shop, at poor Catherine, thin and pale with grief, he became furious. One day he had the audacity to be jealous

of me on account of his wife, who was as pure as the blessed Virgin, reminding me that I was once her lover and accusing me of still being so, with slanders and infamies that I should be ashamed to repeat. We almost flew at each other's throats. I saw what I must do. I would see Catherine and my godson no more; and as for Philip, I would only meet him when by chance we worked on the same job.

"Only, you will understand, I loved Catherine and little Camille too well to lose sight of them entirely. On Saturday evenings, when I knew that Philip was drinking up his wages with his comrades, I used to prowl about the quarter, and chat with the boy when I found him; and if it was too miserable at home, he did not return with empty hands, you know. I believe that the wretched Philip knew that I was helping his wife, and that he closed his eyes to the fact, finding it rather convenient. I will hurry on,

for the story is too miserable. Some years have passed; Philip plunging deeper in vice; but Catherine, whom I had helped all I could, has educated her son, who is now a fellow of twenty years, good and courageous like herself. He is not a workman; he is educated; he has learned to draw at the evening schools, and he is now with an architect, where he gets good wages. And though the house is saddened by the presence of the drunkard, things go fairly well, for Camille is a great comfort to his mother; and for a year or two, when I see Catherine —she is so changed, the poor woman!—leaning on the arm of her manly son, it warms my heart.

"But yesterday evening, coming out of my cook-shop, I met Camille; and shaking hands with him—oh, he is not ashamed of me, and he doesn't blush at a blouse covered with plaster—I saw that something was the matter.

"'Let's see—what's the matter now?'

"'I drew the lot yesterday,' he replied, 'and I drew the number ten—a number that sends you to die with fever in the colonies with the marines. That will, at all events, send me there for five years, to leave mother alone, without resources, with father, who has never been drinking so much, who has never been so wicked. And it will kill her—it will kill her! How cursed it is to be poor!'

"Oh, what a horrible night I passed! Think of it, monsieur le curé, that poor woman's labor for twenty years destroyed in a minute by an unhappy chance; because a child, rummaging in a sack, has drawn an unfortunate number! In the morning I was broken as by age when I went to the house we were building on the Boulevard Arago. Of what use is sorrow? we must work all the same. So I mounted the scaffolding. We had already built the house to the fourth

story, and I began to place my mortar. Suddenly I felt some one strike me on the shoulder. It was Philip. He only worked now when the inclination seized him, and he was apparently putting in a day's work to get something to drink; but the builder, having a forfeit to pay if the building was not finished by a certain date, accepted the first-comers.

V.

"I had not seen Philip for a long time, and it was with difficulty that I recognized him. Burned and fevered by brandy, his beard gray, his hands trembling, he was more than an old man—he was a ruin.

"'Well,' I said to him, 'the boy has drawn a bad number.'

"'What of it?' he replied, with an angry look. 'Are you going to worry me about that, too, like Catherine and Camille? The

boy will do as others have done: he will serve his country. I know what worries them, both my wife and son. If I were dead he would not have to go. But, so much the worse for them, I am still solid at my post, and Camille is not the son of a widow.'

"The son of a widow! Ah, monsieur le curé, why did he use that unhappy phrase? The evil thought came to me at once, and it never quitted me all the morning that I worked at the wretch's side. I imagined all that she was about to suffer—poor Catherine! —when she no longer had her son to care for and protect her, and she must be alone with the miserable drunkard, now completely brutalized, ugly, and capable of anything. A neighboring clock struck eleven, and the workmen all descended to lunch. We remained until the last, Philip and I, but in stepping on the ladder to descend, he turned to me with a leer, and said, in his hoarse, dissipated voice:

"'You see, steady as a sailor; Camille is not nearly the son of a widow.'

"The blood mounted to my head. I was beside myself. I seized with both hands the rounds of the ladder to which Philip clung shouting 'Help!' and with a single effort I toppled it over.

"He was instantly killed—by an accident, they said—and now Camille is the son of a widow and need not go.

"That is what I have done, monsieur le curé, and what I want to tell to you and to the good God. I repent, I ask pardon, of course; but I must not see Catherine in her black dress, happy on the arm of her son, or I could not regret my crime. To prevent that I will emigrate—I will lose myself in America. As to my penance—see, monsieur le curé, here is the little cross of gold that Catherine refused when she told me that she was in love with Philip. I have always kept it, in memory of the only happy days that I

ever knew in my life. Take it and sell it. Give the money to the poor."

Jack rose absolved by the Abbé Faber.

One thing is certain, and that is that the priest never sold the little cross of gold. After having paid its price into the Treasury of the Church, he hung the jewel, as an *ex-voto*, on the altar of the chapel of the Virgin, where he often went to pray for the poor mason.

THE SABOTS OF LITTLE WOLFF.

Once upon a time—it was so long ago that the whole world has forgotten the date—in a city in the north of Europe—whose name is so difficult to pronounce that nobody remembers it—once upon a time there was a little boy of seven, named Wolff, an orphan in charge of an old aunt who was hard and avaricious, who only embraced him on New-Year's Day, and who breathed a sigh of regret every time that she gave him a porringer of soup.

But the poor little chap was naturally so good that he loved the old woman just the same, although she frightened him very

much, and he could never see without trembling the great wart, ornamented with four gray hairs, which she had on the end of her nose.

As the aunt of Wolff was known through all the village to have a house and an old stocking full of gold, she did not dare send her nephew to the school for the poor. But she so schemed to obtain a reduction of the price with the school-master whose school little Wolff attended, that the bad teacher, vexed at having a scholar so badly dressed and who paid so poorly, punished him very often and unjustly with the backboard and fool's cap, and even stirred his fellow-pupils against him, all sons of well-to-do men, who made the orphan their scapegoat.

The poor little fellow was therefore as miserable as the stones in the street, and hid himself in out-of-the-way corners to cry; when Christmas came.

The night before Christmas the school-

master was to take all of his pupils to the midnight mass, and bring them back to their homes.

Now, as the winter was very severe that year, and as for several days a great quantity of snow had fallen, the scholars came to the rendezvous warmly wrapped and bundled up, with fur caps pulled down over their ears, double and triple jackets, knitted gloves and mittens, and good thick nailed boots with strong soles. Only little Wolff came shivering in the clothes that he wore week-days and Sundays, and with nothing on his feet but coarse Strasbourg socks and heavy sabots, or wooden shoes.

His thoughtless comrades made a thousand jests over his sad looks and his peasant's dress. But the orphan was so occupied in blowing on his fingers, and suffered so much from his chilblains, that he took no notice of them; and the troop of boys, with the master at their head, started for the church.

It was fine in the church, which was resplendent with wax-candles ; and the scholars, excited by the pleasant warmth, profited by the noise of the organ and the singing to talk to each other in a low voice. They boasted of the fine suppers that were waiting for them at home. The son of the burgomaster had seen, before he went out, a monstrous goose that the truffles marked with black spots like a leopard. At the house of the first citizen there was a little fir-tree in a wooden box, from whose branches hung oranges, sweetmeats, and toys. And the cook of the first citizen had pinned behind her back the two strings of her cap, as she only did on her days of inspiration when she was sure of succeeding with her famous sugar-candy. And then the scholars spoke, too, of what the Christ-child would bring to them, of what he would put in their shoes, which they would, of course, be very careful to leave in the chimney before going to bed.

And the eyes of those little chaps, lively as a parcel of mice, sparkled in advance with the joy of seeing in their imagination pink paper bags of burnt almonds, lead soldiers drawn up in battalions in their boxes, menageries smelling of varnished wood, and magnificent jumping-jacks covered with purple and bells.

Little Wolff knew very well by experience that his old miserly aunt would send him supperless to bed. But in the simplicity of his soul, and knowing that he had been all the year as good and industrious as possible, he hoped that the Christ-child would not forget him, and he, too, looked eagerly forward by-and-by to putting his wooden shoes in the ashes of the fireplace.

The midnight mass concluded, the faithful went away, anxious for supper, and the band of scholars, walking two by two after their teacher, left the church.

Now, under the porch, sitting on a stone

seat under a Gothic niche, a child was sleeping—a child covered by a robe of white linen, and whose feet were bare, notwithstanding the cold. He was not a beggar, for his robe was new and nice, and near him on the ground were seen, lying in a cloth, a square, a hatchet, a pair of compasses, and the other tools of a carpenter's apprentice. Under the light of the stars, his face, with its closed eyes, bore an expression of divine sweetness, and his long locks of golden hair seemed like an *auréole* about his head. But the child's feet, blue in the cold of that December night, were sad to see.

The scholars, so well clothed and shod for the winter, passed heedlessly before the unknown child. One of them, even, the son of one of the principal

men in the village, looked at the waif with an expression in which could be seen all the scorn of the rich for the poor, the well-fed for the hungry.

But little Wolff, coming the last out of the church, stopped, full of compassion, before the beautiful sleeping infant.

"Alas!" said the orphan to himself, "it is too bad: this poor little one going barefoot in such bad weather. But what is worse than all, he has not to-night even a boot or a wooden shoe to leave before him while he sleeps, so that the Christ-child could put something there to comfort him in his misery."

And, carried away by the goodness of his heart, little Wolff took off the wooden shoe from his right foot, and laid it in front of the sleeping child; and then, as best he could, limping along on his poor blistered foot and dragging his sock through the snow, he went back to his aunt's.

"Look at the worthless fellow!" cried his

aunt, full of anger at his return without one of his shoes. "What have you done with your wooden shoe, little wretch?"

Little Wolff did not know how to deceive, and although he was shaking with terror at seeing the gray hairs bristle up on the nose of the angry woman, he tried to stammer out some account of his adventure.

But the old woman burst into a frightful peal of laughter.

"Ah, monsieur takes off his shoes for beggars! Ah, monsieur gives away his wooden shoe to a barefoot! That is something new for example! Ah, well, since that is so, I am going to put the wooden shoe which you have left in the chimney, and I promise you the Christ-child will leave there to-night something to whip you with in the morning. And you shall pass the day to-morrow on dry bread and water. We will see if next time you give away your shoes to the first vagabond that comes."

And the wicked woman, after having given the poor boy a couple of slaps, made him climb up to his bed in the attic. Grieved to the heart, the child went to bed in the dark, and soon went to sleep on his pillow steeped with tears.

But on the morrow morning, when the old woman, awakened by the cold and shaken by her cough, went down stairs—oh, wonderful sight!—she saw the great chimney full of beautiful playthings, and sacks of magnificent candies, and all sorts of good things; and before all these splendid things the right shoe, that her nephew had given to the little waif, stood by the side of the left shoe, that she herself had put there that very night, and where she meant to put a birch-rod.

And as little Wolff, running down to learn the meaning of his aunt's exclamation, stood in artless ecstasy before all these splendid Christmas presents, suddenly there were loud

cries of laughter out-of-doors. The old woman and the little boy went out to know what it all meant, and saw all the neighbors gathered around the public fountain. What had happened? Oh, something very amusing and very extraordinary. The children of all the rich people of the village, those whose parents had wished to surprise them by the most beautiful gifts, had found only rods in their shoes.

Then the orphan and the old woman, thinking of all the beautiful things that were in their chimney, were full of amazement. But presently they saw the curé coming with wonder in his face. Above the seat, placed near the door of the church, at the same place where in the evening a child, clad in a white robe, and with feet bare notwithstanding the cold, had rested his sleeping head, the priest had just seen a circle of gold incrusted with precious stones.

And they all crossed themselves devoutly,

comprehending that the beautiful sleeping child, near whom were the carpenter's tools, was Jesus of Nazareth in person, become for an hour such as he was when he worked in his parents' house, and they bowed themselves before that miracle that the good God had seen fit to work, to reward the faith and charity of a child.

THE FOSTER SISTER.

THE FOSTER SISTER.

I.

SITTING in her office at the end of the shop, shut off from it by glass windows, pretty Madame Bayard, in a black gown and with her hair in sober braids, was writing steadily in an enormous ledger with leather corners, while her husband, following his morning custom, stopped at the door to scold his workmen, who had not finished unloading a dray from the Northern Railway, which blocked the road, and carried to

the druggist of the Rue Vieille du Temple a dozen casks of glucose.

"I have bad news to tell you," said Madame Bayard, sticking her pen in a cup of leaden shot, when her husband had entered the glass cage. "Poor Voisin is dead."

"The nurse of Leon? Poor woman! And her little daughter?"

"That is the saddest part, my dear. A relative of poor Voisin writes me that they are too poor to take charge of the child, and she must be sent to an orphan asylum."

"Oh, those peasants!"

The druggist was silent for a moment, rubbing his thick blond beard; then suddenly looking at his wife with kindly eyes:

"Say, Mimi, the child is the foster sister of our Leon. Suppose we give her a home?"

"I should think so," was the quiet reply of the pretty wife.

"Well done," cried Bayard, as, caring little if he were seen by his clerks and store-boys, he leaned towards his wife and kissed her forehead, "well done! you're a good woman, Mimi. We will take little Norine with us, and bring her up with Leon. That won't ruin us, eh? Besides, I have just made a good stroke in quinine. We will go after the child Sunday to Argenteuil, sha'n't we?"

"We will make that our Sunday excursion."

II.

Good people, these Bayards; an honor to the drug trade. Their marriage had united two houses which had been for a long time rivals; for Bayard was the son of *The Silver Pill*, founded by his great-great-grandfather in 1756 in the Rue Vieille du Temple,

and had espoused the daughter of the *Offering to Esculapius*, of the Rue des Lombards, an establishment which dated from the First Empire, as was shown by the sign, copied from the celebrated painting of Guérin. Honest people, excellent people—and there are many more, like them, whatever folks may say, among the older Paris houses, conservators of old traditions; going to the second tier, on Sunday, at the opera comique, and ignorant of false weights and measures. It was the curé of Blancs-Manteaux who had managed that marriage with his confrère of Saint-Merry. The first had ministered at the death-bed of the elder Bayard, and was dismayed to see a young man of twenty-five all alone in a house so gloomy as that of *The Silver Pill*, justly famed for its ipecac; and the second was anxious to establish Mademoiselle Simonin, to whom he had administered her first communion, and whose father was one of his most important parishioners,

old Simonin of the *Offering to Esculapius*, celebrated for its camphor. The negotiations were successful; camphor and ipecac, two excellent specialties, were united in the holy bonds of matrimony, there was a dinner and ball at the Grand Véfour, and now for ten years, tranquilly working every day, summer and winter, in her glass cage, Madame Bayard, with her pale brown face and her plaited hair, had smitten the hearts of all the young clerks of the quarter Sainte-Croix de la Bretonnerie.

And yet for a long time there had been a disappointment in that happy household, a cloud in that bright sky. An heir was wanted, and it was five years before little Leon came into the world. One can imagine with what joy he was received. Now one day they might write over the door of *The Silver Pill* these words, "Bayard & Son." But as the infant arrived at the time of a boom in isinglass, Madame Bayard, whose presence

in the shop was indispensable, could not think of nursing him. She even gave up the idea of taking a nurse in the house, fearing for the new-born the close air of that corner of old Paris, and contented herself with taking every Sunday with her husband a little excursion to Argenteuil to see her son with his nurse Voisin, who was overwhelmed with coffee, sugar, soap, and other dainties. At the end of eighteen months Mother Voisin brought back the baby in a magnificent state, and for two years a child's nurse, chosen with great care, had taken the child out for his airings in the square of the Tour Saint-Jacques, and had exhibited for the admiration of her companion-nurses, the pouting lips, the high color, and the dimpled back of the future druggist.

And now these good Bayards, learning of the death of Mother Voisin, could not bear the thought that the little girl who had been nourished at the same breast with their boy

should be abandoned to public charity, so they went to Argenteuil for Norine.

Poor little one! Since the fifteen days that her mother slept in the cemetery she had been taken charge of by a cousin who kept a billiard-saloon; and though she was not

yet five years old, she had been put to work washing the beer-glasses.

The Bayards found her charming, with great eyes as blue as the summer sun, and her thick blond tresses escaping from her ugly black bonnet. Leon, who had been

brought with his nurse, embraced his foster sister; and the cousin, who that very morning had boxed the orphan's ears for negligence in sweeping out the hall, appeared before the Parisians to be as much touched as if parting with Norine was a heart-breaking affair.

The order for an ample breakfast restored his serenity.

It was a beautiful Sunday in June, and they were in the country — "an occasion which should be improved," declared Bayard, "by taking the air; shouldn't it, Mimi?"

And while pretty Madame Bayard, having pinned up her skirts, went out with the children and the nurse to pick flowers in a neighboring field, the druggist, who was less ambitious, treated the saloon-keeping cousin to a glass of vermouth, seated at the billiard-table, which was covered with dead flies. They breakfasted under a vineless arbor, which the hot noonday sun riddled with its

rays. But what of that? They were pleased and contented all the same. Madame Bayard had hung her hat on the lattice; and her husband, wearing a bargeman's straw helmet, which had been lent to him by the saloon-keeper, cut up the duck in the best of spirits. Little Leon and Norine, who had immediately become the best of friends, emptied the salad-bowl of its cream-cheese. Then they all romped in the grass, went boating on the stream, and, intoxicated with the fresh country air, the indwellers of the city, coming from the close Paris streets, pushed to its fullest extreme this idyl in the fashion of Paul de Kock.

For, yes; there was a moment, as they came back in the boat, in a delicious sunset, when

tinted clouds floated in a glowing sky, when Madame Bayard—the serious Madame Bayard—whose frown turned to stone the shop-boys of the druggist, sang the air called "To the Shores of France," to the rhythmic fall of the oars, plied by her husband in his shirt-sleeves. They dined in the arbor where they had breakfasted, but the second repast was a shade less happy. The night-moths, which dashed in to burn themselves at the candles, frightened the children; and Madame Bayard was so tired that she could not even guess the simple rebus on her dessert napkin.

Never mind; it has been a good day; and on their return in a first-class carriage—this was not a time for petty economies — Madame Bayard, with her head on her husband's shoulder, watching Leon and Norine, limp with sleep on the lap of the nurse, half asleep herself, murmured to her husband, in a happy voice:

"See, Ferdinand; we have done well to take the little one. She will be a comrade for Leon. They will be like brother and sister."

III.

In fact, they did thus grow up together.

They were most kind-hearted people, these Bayards. They made no difference between the humble orphan and their own dear boy, who would one day in the firm of "Bayard & Son" work monopolies in rhubarb and corners in castor-oil; indeed, they loved as their own child little Norine, who was as intelligent as she was charming, as fair in mind as she was delicate in body.

Now the nurse took the two children to the square of the Tour Saint-Jacques when the weather was pleasant, and in the evening at the family table there were two high-chairs side by side for the boy and his foster sister.

In addition to which, the Bayards were not slow to perceive the good influence which Norine had upon Leon. Quicker, of a more nervous temperament, more easy of comprehension than the lymphatic boy, whose wits were "wool-gathering," according to his father, she seemed to communicate to him something of her own spirit and fire. "She jogs him up," said Madame Bayard.

And since he had lived with his foster sister Leon had perceptibly grown brighter and quicker. When they were of an age to learn to read, Leon, who made but little progress, and stumbled along with one of those alphabets with pictures where the letter E is by the side of an elephant and the letter Z by the side of a zouave, was the despair of his mother. But as soon as Norine, who in a very short time learned to spell and read, came to the aid of the little man, he immediately made rapid progress.

So things went on, until both children

were sent to a school for little children kept by a gentlewoman named Merlin, in the Rue de l'Homme Armé. According to the fallacious circular which Mademoiselle Merlin sent to the folks of the quarter, there was a garden—that is to say, four broomsticks in

a sandy court; and it was there, the first day during recess, that the innocent Leon burst into cries of terror when he saw the school-mistress, forced by some accident to interrupt her knitting, stick one of her great knitting-needles in her capacious head-dress. A "senior," who was more familiar with her head-dress, explained the phenomenon in vain to Leon and Norine, for the boy, none the less, preserved in the presence of Mademoiselle Merlin an impression of superstitious terror.

She would have paralyzed his infant faculties, and have prevented him in the class from following the pointer of Mademoiselle Merlin, as she sniffled through her sing-song lecture before the map of Europe, or the table of weights and measures, if Norine had not been there to reassure and encourage him. She was at once the first scholar in the school, and became for slow and lazy Leon a sort of sisterly counsellor and affec-

tionate under-teacher. Towards four o'clock Madame Bayard had the two children, whom the nurse had brought back to the store, placed near her in the glass office; and Norine, opening a copy-book or a book, explained to Leon the uncomprehended task or made him repeat the lesson that he had not understood.

"The good God has rewarded us," Madame Bayard sometimes whispered to her husband in the evening. "That little Norine is a treasure, and so good, so industrious! Only to-day I listened to her helping Leon again. I believe that without her he would never have learned the multiplication-table."

"I believe you, Mimi," responded Bayard. "I have observed it. Things go on marvellously well with us, and we will portion her and marry her, shall we not, when she comes to a suitable age?"

IV.

Age comes—ah, how fast age comes! And behold! now in the glass cage of the shop there is a slender and beautiful young girl sitting at the side of Madame Bayard, who already shows some silver threads in her black bands. It is Norine now who writes in the great ledger with leather corners, while her adopted mother plies her needles on some embroidery.

Seven o'clock! Time that they came home, and the shop must be closed against the November wind which is twisting and turning the flames of the gas-jets.

Look at them now: Bayard grown stout, portly, and covered with trinkets, while Leon, who has just entered the first class in pharmacy, has actually become a fine-looking young fellow.

"Good-day, Mimi; good-day, Norine! Let us go right in to dinner. I will tell you all

the news while we are eating the soup," said the druggist.

They went up to the dining-room, and while Madame Bayard, sitting under a barometer in the shape of a lyre, served the thick soup, Bayard, tucking his napkin in his vest and regarding his wife with a knowing look, said,

"You know it is all right."

"The Forgets agree?"

"Exactly; and Leon will espouse Hortense in six months, and our daughter-in-law will come and live with us. Yes, Norine, you have known nothing about it, because one does not speak of such things before young girls; but for more than a year Leon has been in love with Hortense Forget, and has been teasing us to arrange the marriage—not such a difficult thing after all, since it only required a word. Leon is a good catch. The only difficulty was that we wanted to keep our son with us. At last it is all ar-

ranged, and your foster brother will have the wife he wants. I hope you are pleased."

"Very much pleased," replied Norine.

Oh, deaf and blind! They never heard the voice of Norine when she replied to them—that low, pathetic tone, which is the echo of a broken heart. Nor did they see how pale she became, and that her head, suddenly grown heavy, swayed from side to side as if Norine were about to faint. They saw nothing, comprehended nothing; and for a long time they had seen and comprehended nothing. Yet they dearly loved this Norine, who was the grace, the charm of the house. They dreamed, these good people, of marrying her one of these days to their head-clerk, a widower of prudent and economical habits, and "all that is necessary to make a woman happy." Leon loved her, too, with all his heart; but as a dear, good sister. Nor did the great spoiled boy suspect that Norine loved him, and suffered from her love—aye, to death

itself. No; even that evening, when they had unconsciously inflicted upon her the worst of torture, they never suspected the truth; and they would sleep peacefully, indulging in beautiful dreams of the future, at the very hour when, shut in her chamber—the chamber separated by such a thin partition from that of her adopted parents—Norine would fall upon her bed, fainting with grief, and bury her head in her pillow to stifle her sobs.

V.

The ball is finished; and in the empty rooms the candles, burned to the very end, have broken some of the sconces and the fragments lie upon the waxed floors.

The Bayards have insisted that the wedding should be celebrated at their house; but by the aid of many flowers (it is midsummer) they have given a holiday appear-

ance to the apartment in the Rue Vieille du Temple where they have triumphantly installed their daughter-in-law.

At last it is finished; the young couple have retired to their nuptial chamber, where Madame Bayard has gone for a moment with them. Coming out she found Norine still in the little salon, helping the servants extinguish the lights. She embraced the young girl tenderly, saying,

"Go to bed, my child. You must be very tired." And she added, with a smile, "Well, it will be your turn before long."

And Norine was at last alone in the room, now so gloomy, and lighted only by her single candle resting on the piano.

Heavens! how heavy was the odor of the flowers, and how her head ached.

Ah, that horrible day! What torment she had endured since the moment when she knelt, impressed into service as a lady's-maid, with pins in her lips, at the feet of

her rival Hortense, and arranged her white satin train, to the hour when Leon, holding his wife by the waist, drew her towards her, Norine, and the lips of the young couple met almost upon her very forehead!

Oh, the odor of the flowers is insupportable, and she is so giddy and faint.

She fell upon a sofa, unnerved by a frightful headache, her head thrown back, clasping her forehead with her two hands, but with open eyes staring always at the door—the door of that chamber which was shut upon the young couple, closed upon the mystery which was breaking her heart. A sort of delirium overwhelmed her. How the heavy perfume of those flowers overpowered her, and how a thousand memories assailed her at once.

She was a child again in the saloon at Argenteuil, and the kind Parisians came and caressed her. She was embraced by the dear little boy wearing a white plume in his hat. Rapid pictures flashed upon her soul. The *pension* of the Rue de l'Homme Armé, and Mademoiselle Merlin, with her knitting-needle stuck in her head-dress, pointed with the end of her stick to the table of weights and measures. The drug-store on Sundays, all dark, the shutters closed, and she playing catch with Leon among the barrels and sacks.

Good God! was she losing her head? She could not help humming that waltz, during which Leon once held her in his arms. She was stifled. Oh, the flowers! She must go out, or at least open a window. But she could not rise; her strength had deserted her. Could she die thus? Two iron fingers seemed to be pressing her temples. Oh, the roses and the orange-flowers—those orange-flowers above all!

At last she made a great effort. She rose upright and pale—pale as her white robe. But suddenly her strength left her, and falling first upon her knees, and then with her head and shoulders upon the wood floor, poor Norine lay stretched at the threshold of the bridal chamber, killed by disappointed love and by the flowers.

MY FRIEND MEURTRIER.

I.

I was at one time employed in a government office. Every day from ten o'clock until four I became a voluntary prisoner in a depressing office, adorned with yellow pasteboard boxes, and filled with the musty odor of old papers. There I lunched on Italian cheese and apples which I roasted at the grate. I read the morning papers, even to the advertisements; I rhymed verses, and I attended to the affairs of state to the extent of drawing at the end of each month

a salary which barely kept me from starving.

I recall to-day one of my companions in captivity at that epoch.

He was called Achille Meurtrier, and certainly his fierce look and tall form seemed to warrant that name. He was a great big fellow, about forty years old, not too much chest or shoulders, but who increased his apparent size by wearing felt hats with wide brims, ample and short coats, large plaid trousers, and neckties of a sanguine red under rolling collars. He wore a full beard, long hair, and was very proud of his hairy hands.

The chief boast of Meurtrier, otherwise the best and most amiable of companions, was to trifle with an athletic constitution, to possess the biceps of a prize-fighter, and, as he said himself, not to know his own strength. He never made a gesture, even in the exercise of his peaceful profession, that did not

have for its object to convince the spectators of his prodigious vigor. Did he have to take from its case a half-empty pasteboard box, he advanced towards the shelf with the heavy step of a street porter, grasped the box solidly with a tight hand, and carried it with a stiff arm as far as the next table, with a shrugging of shoulders and frowning of brow worthy of Milo of Crotona. He carried this manner so far that he never used less apparent effort even to lift the lightest objects, and one day when he held in his right hand a basket of old papers I saw him extend his left arm horizontally as if to make a counterpoise to the tremendous weight.

I ought to say that this robust creature inspired me with a profound respect, for I was then, even more than to-day, physically weak and delicate, and in consequence filled with admiration for that energetic physique which I lacked.

The conversations of Meurtrier were not

of a nature to diminish the admiration with which he inspired me.

In the summer, above all, on Monday mornings, when we had returned to the office after our Sunday holiday, he had an inexhaustible fund of stories concerning his adventures and feats of strength. After taking off his felt-hat, his coat, and his vest, and wiping the perspiration from his forehead with the sleeve of his shirt, to indicate his sanguine and ardent temperament, he would thrust his hands deep in the pockets of his trousers, and, standing near me in an attitude of perpendicular solidity, begin a monologue something as follows:

"What a Sunday, my boy! Positively no fatigue can lay me up. Think of it: yesterday was the regatta at Joinville-le-Pont; at six o'clock in the morning the rendezvous at Bercy, at The Mariners, for the crew of the *Marsouin;* the sun is up; a glass of white wine and we jump into our rowing suits, seize an

oar and give way—one-two, one-two—as far as Joinville; then overboard for a swim before breakfast—strip to swimming drawers, a jump overboard, and look out for squalls. After my bath I have the appetite of a tiger. Good! I seize the boat by one hand and I call out, 'Charpentier, pass me a small ham.' Three motions in one time and I have finished it to the bone. 'Charpentier, pass me the brandy-flask.' Three swallows and it is empty."

So the description would continue—dazzling, Homeric.

"It is the hour for the regatta—noon—the sun just overhead. The boats draw up in line on the sparkling river, before a tent gaudy with streamers. On the bank the mayor with his staff of office, gendarmes in yellow shoulder-belts, and a swarm of summer dresses, open parasols,

and straw hats. Bang! the signal-gun is fired. The *Marsouin* shoots ahead of all her competitors and easily gains the prize —and no fatigue! We go around Marne, and, returning, dine at Créteil. How cool the evening in the dusky arbor, where pipes glow through the darkness, and moths singe their wings in the flame of the *omelette au kirsch*. At the end of a dessert, served on decorated plates, we hear from the ball-room the call of the cornet—'Take places for the quadrille!' But already a rival crew, beaten that same morning, has monopolized the prettiest girls. A fight!—teeth broken, eyes blackened, ugly falls, and whacks below the belt; in a word, a poem of physical enthusiasm, of noisy hilarity, of animal spirits, without speaking of the return at midnight, through crowded stations, with girls whom we lift into the cars, friends separated calling from one end of the train to the other, and fellows playing a horn upon the roof."

And the evenings of my astonishing companion were not less full of adventure than his Sundays. Collar-and-elbow wrestling in a tent, under the red light of torches, between him—simple amateur—and Du Bois, the iron man, in person; rat-chases near the mouths of sewers, with dogs as fierce as tigers; sanguinary encounters at night, in the most dangerous quarters, with ruffians and nose-eaters, were the most insignificant episodes of his nightly career. Nor do I dare relate other adventures of a more intimate character, from which, as the writers of an earlier day would say in noble style, a pen the least timorous would recoil with horror.

However painful it may be to confess an unworthy sentiment, I am obliged to say that my admiration for Meurtrier was not unmixed with regret and bitterness. Perhaps there was mingled with it something of envy. But the recitation of his most mar-

vellous exploits had never awakened in me the least feeling of incredulity, and Achille Meurtrier easily took his place in my mind among heroes and demigods, between Roland and Pirithous.

II.

At this time I was a great wanderer in the suburbs, and I occupied the leisure of my summer evenings by solitary walks in those distant regions, as unknown to the Parisians of the boulevards as the country of the Caribbees, and of whose sombre charm I endeavored later to tell in verse.

One evening in July, hot and dusty, at the hour when the first gas-lights were beginning to twinkle in the misty twilight, I was walking slowly from Vaugirard through one of those long and depressing suburban streets lined on each side by houses of unequal height, whose porters and porteresses, in

shirt sleeves and in calico, sat on the steps and imagined that they were taking the fresh air. Hardly any one passing in the whole street; perhaps, from end to end, a mason, white with plaster, a sergeant-de-ville, a child carrying home a four-pound loaf larger than himself, or a young girl hurrying on in hat and cloak, with a leather bag on her arm; and every quarter-hour the half-empty omnibus coming back to its place of departure with the heavy trot of its tired horses.

Stumbling now and then on the pavement —for asphalt is an unknown luxury in these places—I went down the street, tasting all the delights of a stroller. Sometimes I stopped before a vacant lot to watch, through the broken boards of the fence, the fading glories of the setting sun and the black silhouettes of the chimneys thrown against a greenish sky. Sometimes, through an open window on the ground-floor, I caught sight of an interior, picturesque and familiar: here

a jolly-looking laundress holding her flat-iron to her cheek; there workmen sitting at tables and smoking in the basement of a cabaret, while an old Bohemian with long gray hair, standing before them, sang something about "Liberty," accompanying himself on a guitar about the color of bouillon — the scenes of Chardin and Van Ostade.

Suddenly I stopped.

One of these personal pictures had caught my eye by its domestic and charming simplicity.

She looked so happy and peaceful in her quiet little room, the dear old lady in her black gown and widow's cap, leaning back in an easy-chair covered with green Utrecht velvet, and sitting quietly with her hands folded on her lap. Everything around her was so old and simple, and seemed to have been preserved, less through a wise economy than on account of hallowed memories, since the honey-moon with monsieur of the high

complexion, in a frock-coat and flowered waistcoat, whose oval crayon ornamented the wall. By two lamps on the mantle-shelf every detail of the old-fashioned furniture

could be distinguished, from the clock on a fish of artificial and painted marble to the old and antiquated piano, on which, without doubt, as a young girl, in leg-of-mutton sleeves and with hair dressed *à la Grecque*, she had played the airs of Romagnesi.

Certainly a loved and only daughter, remaining unmarried through her affection for her mother, piously watched over the last years of the widow. It was she, I was sure, who had so tenderly placed her dear mother; she who had put the ottoman under her feet, she who had put near her the inlaid table, and arranged on it the waiter and two cups. I expected already to see her coming in carrying the evening coffee — the sweet, calm girl, who should be dressed in mourning like the widow, and resemble her very much.

Absorbed by the contemplation of a scene so sympathetic, and by the pleasure of imagining that humble poem, I remained standing some steps from the open window, sure of not being noticed in the dusky street, when I saw a door open and there appeared —oh, how far he was from my thoughts at that moment—my friend Meurtrier himself, the formidable hero of tilts on the river and frays in unknown places.

A sudden doubt crossed me. I felt that I was on the point of discovering a mystery.

It was indeed he. His terrible hairy hand held a tiny silver coffee-pot, and he was followed by a poodle which greatly embarrassed his steps — a valiant and classic poodle, the poodle of blind clarionet-players, a poor beggar's poodle, a poodle clipped like a lion, with hairy ruffles on his four paws, and a white mustache like a general of the Gymnase.

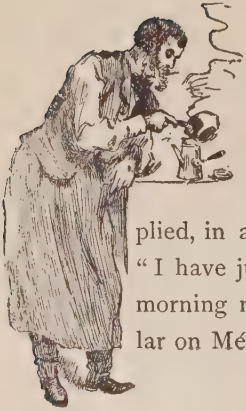
"Mamma," said the giant, in a tone of ineffable tenderness, "here is your coffee. I am sure that you will find it nice to-night. The water was boiling well, and I poured it on drop by drop."

"Thank you," said the old lady, rolling her easy-chair to the table with an air; "thank you, my little Achille. Your dear father said many a time that there was not my equal at making coffee—he was so kind and indulgent, the dear, good man — but I

begin to believe that you are even better than I."

At that moment, and while Meurtrier was pouring out the coffee with all the delicacy of a young girl, the poodle, excited no doubt by the uncovered sugar, placed his forepaws on the lap of his mistress.

"Down, Médor," she cried, with a benevolent indignation. "Did any one ever see such a troublesome animal? Look here, sir! you know very well that your master never fails to give you the last of his cup. By-the-way," added the widow, addressing her son, "you have taken the poor fellow out, have you not?"



"Certainly, mamma," he replied, in a tone that was almost infantile. "I have just been to the creamery for your morning milk, and I put the leash and collar on Médor and took him with me."

"And he has attended to all his little wants?"

"Don't be disturbed. He doesn't want anything."

Reassured on this point, important to canine hygiene, the good dame drank her coffee, between her son and her dog, who each regarded her with an inexpressible tenderness.

It was assuredly unnecessary to see or hear more. I had already descried what a peaceful family life—upright, pure, and devoted—my friend Meurtrier hid under his chimerical gasconades. But the spectacle with which chance had favored me was at once so droll and so touching that I could not resist the temptation to watch for some moments longer. That indiscretion sufficed to show me the whole truth.

Yes, this type of roisterers, who seemed to have stepped from one of the romances of Paul de Kock—this athlete, this despot of

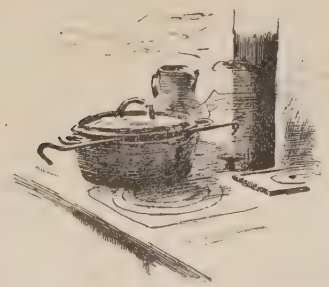
bar-rooms and public-houses — performed simply and courageously, in these lowly rooms in the suburbs, the sublime duties of a sister of charity. This intrepid oarsman had never made a longer voyage than to conduct his mother to mass or vespers every Sunday. This billiard expert knew only how to play bézique. This trainer of bull-dogs was the submissive slave of a poodle. This Mauvaise-Philibert was an Antigone.

III.

The next morning, on arriving at the office, I asked Meurtrier how he had employed the previous evening, and he instantly improvised, without a moment's hesitation, an account of a sharp encounter on the boulevard at two in the morning, when he had knocked down with a single blow of his fist, having passed his thumb through the ring of his

keys, a terrible street rough. I listened, smiling ironically, and thinking to confound him; but remembering how respectable a virtue is which is hidden even under an absurdity, I struck him amicably on the shoulder, and said, with conviction:

"Meurtrier, you are a hero!"



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